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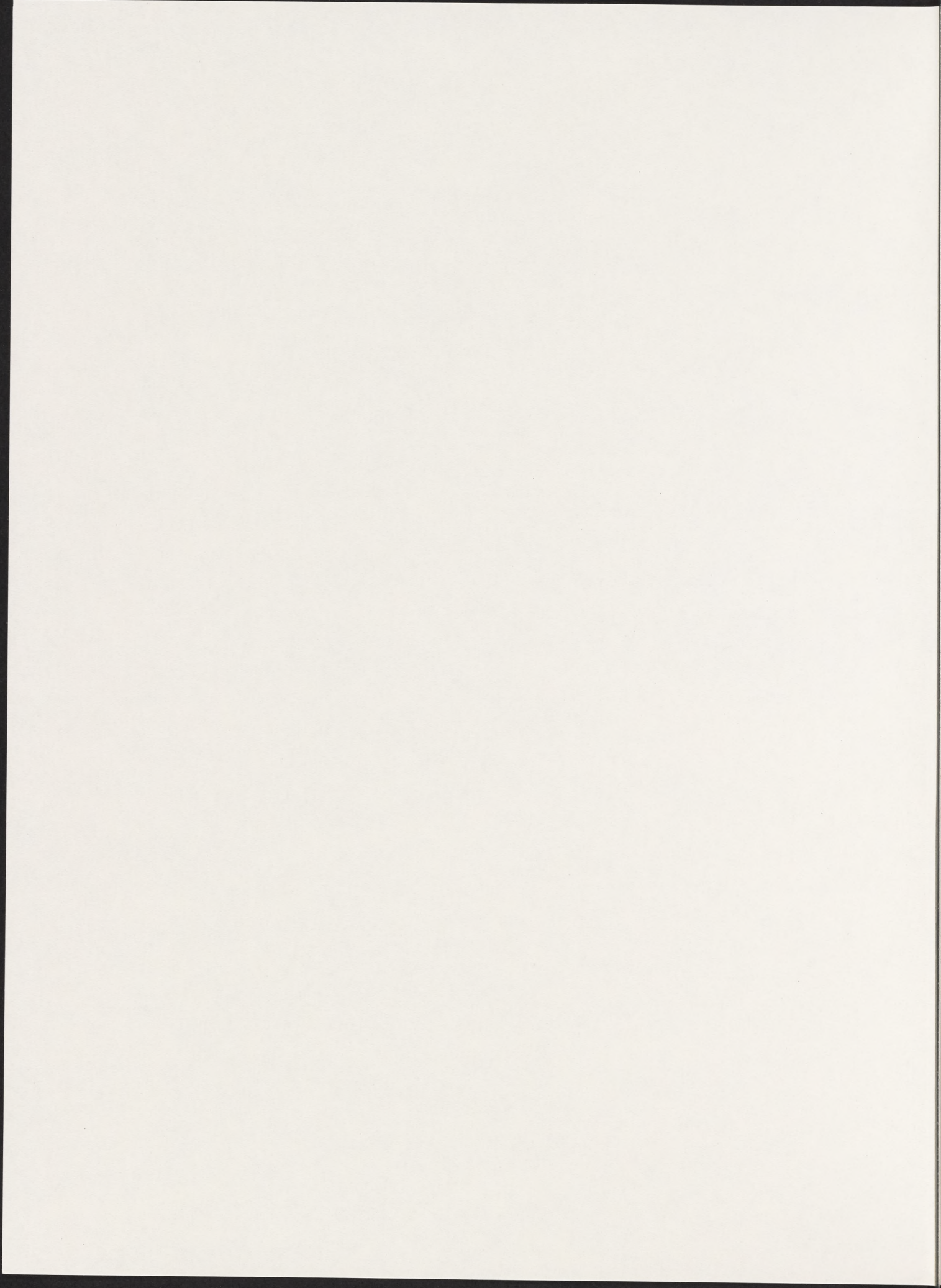
1999-2000

Marie G. Thayer  
to University of California  
June 26 and 27, 1999

Processed by Linda H. Rogers

1999-2000 Program of the University of California  
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100 Main Street  
Davis, California 95616-1000







## Interview with

Mario G. Obledo  
in Sacramento, California  
July 26 and 27, 1999

Interviewed by Carlos Vásquez

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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### Interviewer:

Carlos Vásquez

Director, University of New Mexico Oral History Program

Director, Research and Literary Arts, National Hispanic Cultural Center  
of New Mexico

B.A., UCLA [Political Science]

M.A., Stanford University [Political Science]

Ph.D. Candidate, UCLA [History]

### Interview Time and Place:

July 26, 1999

Obledo's office in Old Town, Sacramento, California

July 27, 1999

Obledo's office in Old Town, Sacramento, California

### Editing:

Carlos Vasquez checked the verbatim manuscript of the interview against the original tape recordings, and with transcriber, Katie Trujillo edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spellings, and verified proper names. Insertions by the editor are bracketed. The interviewer also prepared the introductory materials.

### Papers:

Mario Obledo's papers are located in the Special Collections Department of the Shields Library, located on the campus of the University of California, Davis.

### Tapes and Interview Records:

The original tape recordings of the interview include not only audiocassette tapes, but also digital and analogue video recordings made at the time of the interview by the interviewer. Master tapes are preserved at the University of California, Davis.

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### Interviewer

Charles V. Wagoner  
Professor, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque  
Director, Research and Library, and National Hispanic Cultural Center  
of New Mexico  
B.A., UCLA (Political Science)  
M.A., Stanford University (Political Science)  
Ph.D., California U.C.L.A. (Political Science)

### Interview Location

July 10, 1979  
Chicago's office in the Tower, Sacramento, California  
July 27, 1979  
Chicago's office in the Tower, Sacramento, California

### Notes

Charles V. Wagoner directed the interview and took notes. The original tape recordings and with transcripts, Charles V. Wagoner edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and added some minor corrections by the editor and himself. The interview was prepared for publication by Charles V. Wagoner.

### Index

Charles V. Wagoner's papers are located in the Special Collections Department of the University of California, Los Angeles, and are part of the University of California, Los Angeles.

### Interview Dates

The original tape recordings of the interview are not only not available, but also the original and original video recordings are not available by the University of California, Los Angeles.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Mario G. Obledo was born in San Antonio, Texas on April 9, 1932. He attended public schools in San Antonio. He then attended the University of Texas at Austin until he volunteered for military service during the Korean Conflict. After his military service he returned to U.T., Austin where he received a B.S. degree in pharmacy. He then attended St. Mary's University School of Law, where he received his law degree.

He became the first General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund and served in that capacity from 1968 until 1974. He then joined the faculty at the Harvard School of Law until he was appointed Secretary of Health and Welfare and served in California during the two terms of Governor Edmund Brown, Jr., from 1975 until 1982. In 1982 he launched an unsuccessful campaign for governor of California.

From 1983 until 1985, Obledo was the national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens. From 1989 to 1993 he served as chairman, of the National Rainbow Coalition, Inc. From 1993 to this interview in 1999, Mr. Obledo was active as President of the California Coalition of Hispanic Organizations.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

John C. O'Neil was born in San Antonio, Texas on April 9, 1913. He attended public schools in San Antonio. He then attended the University of Texas at Austin and he volunteered for military service during the Korean Conflict. After his military service he worked as a U.S. Army where he received a U.S. degree in chemistry. He then attended the Army's Chemical School at Fort Belvoir, Illinois where he received his law degree.

He became the first Chemical Counsel of the National Automobile and Transportation Builders Union in the capacity from 1954 until 1974. He then joined the faculty at the Harvard School of Law and he was appointed Secretary of Labor and Justice and served in California during the term of Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. from 1975 until 1982. In 1982 he became the executive director of the Governor of California.

From 1982 until 1987 O'Neil was the national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens. From 1987 to 1995 he served as chairman of the National Labor Council. In 1995 he was elected as chairman of the O'Neil Law Center. He was active as President of the California Council on Labor Relations.



[Session 1, July 26, 1999]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

**VASQUEZ:** We are in Sacramento, California, in the Old Town district, at the offices of Mr. Mario Obledo. This is an interview with Mr. Mario Obledo. It is July 26, 1999, and we are going to do a two-part interview. Today we will concentrate on Mr. Obledo's early life and early career. He's had a long, distinguished, and varied career. So to begin with, give me your full name and date of birth please?

**OBLEDO:** Mario G. [Guerra] Obledo

**VASQUEZ:** And you were born?

**OBLEDO:** April 9, 1932.

**VASQUEZ:** Where?

**OBLEDO:** In San Antonio, Texas.

**VASQUEZ:** I have always been curious, in reading through your papers, about your background. [They] say that your family migrated from Mexico around the period of 1915, which coincides with the Mexican Revolution. Start by telling me a little bit about your grandparents if you will—those that migrated from Mexico.

**OBLEDO:** Well, my grandparents never migrated here. It was both my





mother and father [who migrated].

**VASQUEZ:** Oh is that right? Tell me about your grandparents. What part [of Mexico] were they from?

**OBLEDO:** They were from Monterey, and Guadalajara. That's where they lived. And that's where they died.

**VASQUEZ:** Y como se llamaban [What were their names]?

**OBLEDO:** Barbara, was the name of my Grandmother on my mother's side. And I really don't know the name of my grandfather on my father's side. I never met them.

**VASQUEZ:** What were their last names?

**OBLEDO:** You know I don't really know, I guess Obledo, but I'm just guessing.

**VASQUEZ:** So you never met your grandparents?

**OBLEDO:** No, I didn't.

**VASQUEZ:** Your people migrated, your parents migrated from Monterey about what about 1915?

**OBLEDO:** 1915, yes.

**VASQUEZ:** What do you know about that migratory move?

**OBLEDO:** Well nothing except a revolution was taking place in Mexico and a lot of Mexicans migrated into the United States at that time.

**VASQUEZ:** Where did they come to?

**OBLEDO:** They came to San Antonio.

**VASQUEZ:** Straight to San Antonio?



mother and father (very important).

VASQUEZ: Oh, yes, right. Tell me about your grandparents. What did they do?

was they farm?

ORLEDO: They were from Monterey and Guadalupe. That's where they lived. And

that's where they died.

VASQUEZ: I know as I know. (What were their names?)

ORLEDO: Father was the name of my grandfather on my mother's side. And I

really don't know the name of my grandfather on my father's side. I never

the son.

VASQUEZ: What was his last name?

ORLEDO: Yes, I don't really know. I know Ordoñez, but I'm not sure.

VASQUEZ: So you never met your grandparents?

ORLEDO: No, I don't.

VASQUEZ: Your people might have been in Monterey about when

about 1915?

ORLEDO: 1915, yes.

VASQUEZ: When do you know about the migration, about?

ORLEDO: Well, nothing really. A revolution was taking place in Mexico and a lot of

the people were coming into the United States at that time.

VASQUEZ: Where did they come from?

ORLEDO: They came from San Antonio.

VASQUEZ: Right to San Antonio?

**OBLEDO:** My mother and father, they were not married yet. They met in San Antonio.

**VASQUEZ:** What were your parent's names?

**OBLEDO:** My mother was named Concepción Guerra, My father was Jesús Obledo.

**VASQUEZ:** What were their occupations, respectively?

**OBLEDO:** My mother was a housewife raising us, all her children. My father was a painter and a paperhanger.

**VASQUEZ:** And you grew up in San Antonio?

**OBLEDO:** I grew up in San Antonio.

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me what San Antonio was like in the 1930s, in the depth of the [Great] Depression?

**OBLEDO:** Well there was a lot of unemployment. Actually, the Mexican neighborhood was a very poor neighborhood and the city was segregated at that time. There was a lot of discrimination in San Antonio.

**VASQUEZ:** Can you give me examples of that?

**OBLEDO:** That was the environment that I went through. Well, the schools lacked the educational facilities for the Mexican-Americans. They had no Mexican-American teachers. They were hard on us for speaking Spanish.

**VASQUEZ:** Was there the same kind of discrimination in political or municipal representation?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, discrimination went from top to bottom, in every facet of life, within the public or the private sector, both.

**VASQUEZ:** Where did you go to school?



OBLEDO: My mother and father they were not married yet. They were in San

Anselmo.

VASQUEZ: When was your father married?

OBLEDO: My mother was named Concepcion Garcia. My father was Juan Obledo.

VASQUEZ: When were they married, approximately?

OBLEDO: My mother was a housewife. She was in the kitchen. My father was a

farmer and a cooper.

VASQUEZ: And you grew up in San Anselmo?

OBLEDO: I grew up in San Anselmo.

VASQUEZ: Tell me when San Anselmo was founded. Is it in the state of New

Mexico?

OBLEDO: Well, there was a lot of immigration. A family, the Obledo

family, they were a very poor family. They were in the city of San Anselmo.

They were a poor family. They were in the city of San Anselmo.

VASQUEZ: The first time you came to the city?

OBLEDO: Yes, the first time I came to the city. Well, the first time I

came to the city was in the year 1900. They were in the city of San

Anselmo. They were in the city of San Anselmo. They were in the city of San

VASQUEZ: Is it true that the first time you came to the city was in the year

1900?

OBLEDO: Oh, yes, the first time I came to the city was in the year 1900.

When the first time you came to the city?

VASQUEZ: When did you come to the city?

**OBLEDO:** I went to school in San Antonio--elementary, junior high school, and high school.

**VASQUEZ:** Were you a good student?

**OBLEDO:** Well I was an average student, that's why I say I know of a program right now that picks the top students and encourages them to go to the Ivy League schools like Harvard, etc. And I told the people that were involved with that program that they ought to pick, not the top students, because they are going to make it one way or the other. They are going to seek out [opportunities], they're motivated etc. So you don't have to worry about them. But pick the students in the middle class, the average student, and encourage them to go to those schools.

**VASQUEZ:** Would this be the National Hispanic Institute you're talking about?

**OBLEDO:** No, I'm talking about the Chicano/Latino Youth Leadership Conference.

**VASQUEZ:** So your feeling is that the people toward the bottom of the scale are the ones that probably need the help the most?

**OBLEDO:** That's correct. The top students will find a way to make it.

**VASQUEZ:** What most sticks out in your mind, in terms of the discrimination that you grew up with as a child?

**OBLEDO:** Well actually police brutality. The police were always in our neighborhood beating up people, etc. And it used to irk me to no end to see that. So I vowed that during my career, I would take on the police departments around the country.



ORLEDO: I went to school in San Antonio--elementary, junior high school, and high

school.

VASQUEZ: Was you a good student?

ORLEDO: Well I was an average student. You know I know of a program right

now that looks like the top student and the program then to go to the Ivy

League schools and forward me. And I told the people that were involved

with that program that they ought to look out for the students because

they are going to make some way or the other. They are going to look out

personally, they're interested in the student's how to carry them

there that's the reason in the middle of the semester student and

encourage them to go to their schools.

VASQUEZ: What was the reason behind this program to bring about?

ORLEDO: Well, as far as the Central American Youth Leadership Conference

VASQUEZ: So your feeling is that the people who are the leaders of the youth are the

ones that probably need the help the most.

ORLEDO: That's correct. The top students will take care to make it

VASQUEZ: What would their role be and what is some of the responsibilities that

they are with in a school?

ORLEDO: Well actually, some leadership. The police were almost a war

neighborhood looking up on the street and that's good to be in so that

we can see. So I would that being up there, I would take on the police

department and the community.

**VASQUEZ:** What were the principles of your house, of your home, of your upbringing?

**OBLEDO:** The principles?

**VASQUEZ:** [Yes], what kind of upbringing did you have from your parents?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I had a very strict upbringing, my mother was a very strong woman. My dad died when I was five years old. So my mother raised the whole family and she was a very, very, strong and disciplined women.

**VASQUEZ:** So you were basically raised by a single parent, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** I was.

**VASQUEZ:** I'm interested in your high school [years]. I brought you a photograph once, I don't know if you still have it, of your graduating class. What was the name of your high school?

**OBLEDO:** Fox Tech High School, at the time I went there it was just called Tech High School and later it became Fox Tech.

**VASQUEZ:** So it was a technical school, was the focus on that?

**OBLEDO:** Right, it was a vocational school.

**VASQUEZ:** Is that what it was meant to be?

**OBLEDO:** Auto shop, training in architectural drafting, and things of that kind.

**VASQUEZ:** And I noticed from the photograph that predominately it was a Hispanic population, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** Well at the time that I enrolled in school, the school was changing. It was a transition period from Anglo to Mexican-American. Now I think it's all minorities, but at that time there was quite a few Anglos in the school. In



VASQUEZ: What were the principles of your house of your home at your  
 ORELO: The principles?  
 VASQUEZ: Yes, what kind of upbringing did you have from your parents?  
 ORELO: Well I had a very strict upbringing, my mother was a very strong woman.  
 My father when I was five years old, he was very strict, he was the whole  
 family and the son's very, very, strong and disciplined woman.  
 VASQUEZ: So you were brought up in a very strict home, is that right?  
 ORELO: I was.  
 VASQUEZ: The discipline in your home, which I thought was a discipline.  
 ORELO: Yes, I think I was very strict, I was very strict, I was very strict.  
 ORELO: For your high school, at the time I went there I was just called Jack.  
 High school and then it became for Jack.  
 VASQUEZ: So it was a technical school, was the name on that?  
 ORELO: Right, it was a technical school.  
 VASQUEZ: Is that what it was called to be?  
 ORELO: And that, which is technical training, and things of that kind.  
 VASQUEZ: And I looked at the photograph and I remember it was a technical  
 ORELO: population, is that right?  
 ORELO: Well at the time I enrolled in school, the school was changing, it was  
 a technical school, from a high school to a technical school. Now I think it's all  
 technical, but at that time there was quite a few Anglos in the school, in

fact, the school's [student body] president was an Anglo.

**VASQUEZ:** And where did these students go to school, or did they go to college, after they went to high school?

**OBLEDO:** Well most of them didn't. Since it was a vocational school, they went into the trades after high school. I was very fortunate. When I enrolled at Tech High School I took architectural drafting under a certain Mr.[?]Allsup. After the first semester when I went back for the second semester he wouldn't take me into the class...

**VASQUEZ:** Why is that?

**OBLEDO:** ... and I asked him why. You see Mr. Vasquez my desk was right by the door and across the hall was the cosmetology class. So the girls used to come out to the hall and I'd leave my desk and I'd go out into the hall to talk to them. And I guess I must have done that quite frequently, because Mr. Allsup got upset with me.

**VASQUEZ:** And he wouldn't let you back in?

**OBLEDO:** He wouldn't let me back in. So, as a result of that, I took academic courses: Biology, math, etc. and prepared myself for college. But I was one of the few enrolled in those classes.

**VASQUEZ:** When did it occur to you, when did you know, you wanted to go to college?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I grew up working at a drug store and selling newspapers at hospitals. So the pharmacists there, they were Mexican-American and they encouraged me to go to college.





**VASQUEZ:** Why the University of Texas, at Austin?

**OBLEDO:** Well the University of Texas was a prime university in the state of Texas, and it was the best school in any state, so I decided to get there.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you have the grades for that?

**OBLEDO:** Yes apparently, I was admitted into the university.

**VASQUEZ:** There were no "affirmative action" programs, or assistance programs, at that time?

**OBLEDO:** Not at that time, no.

**VASQUEZ:** You say in an autobiographical statement that you were involved in activities in school. What kinds of activities, what kinds of groups, did you belong to at the University of Texas?

**OBLEDO:** Well at the University of Texas, I belonged to some Mexican-American clubs, the Alba Club, and I started LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens] on campus. So I was pretty much involved in civic activities. And I was involved with the civilian population in Austin, Texas, fighting police brutality cases for instance. So I got to know the people in Austin pretty well.

**VASQUEZ:** So all this was already when you were in college, you were already getting involved in these kind of things?

**OBLEDO:** That's right.

**VASQUEZ:** What kinds of groups were formed there? LULAC primarily?

**OBLEDO:** LULAC primarily.



YASQUEL: Why the University of Texas is famous?

ORLEDO: Well the University of Texas was a private university in the state of Texas.

and it was the best school in my state so I decided to go there.

YASQUEL: Did you have the grades for that?

ORLEDO: Yes yes yes, I was accepted into the university.

YASQUEL: There were no "affirmative action" programs or similar programs at

that time?

ORLEDO: Not at that time at.

YASQUEL: You say in an autobiographical statement that you were involved in

activities in school. You talk about writing, about kinds of groups, did you

belong to the University of Texas?

ORLEDO: Well at the University of Texas I belonged to some Hispanic-American

clubs like the Club and I owned a lot of things at that time.

Hispanic (Latin) or Spanish. So I was pretty much involved in that.

and then that I was involved with the civil rights movement in Austin.

Then I began to work with some of the people. So I got to know the

people in Austin too, well.

YASQUEL: So all this time, when you were in school, you were already getting

involved in these kind of things?

ORLEDO: The whole.

YASQUEL: Was kind of groups were formed there? Like "Students"

ORLEDO: Like that.

**VASQUEZ:** Is this when you started this your first contact with LULAC, or was it?

**OBLEDO:** It was my first contact with LULAC. I went to the state convention in 1955 in Lubbock, Texas, and I recall at the general session I raised my hand and I pledged that I would devote part of my life for the rest of my life to help in my community. And I think I've honored that pledge.

**VASQUEZ:** Do you think that help shaped your life in civil rights?

**OBLEDO:** No question about it.

**VASQUEZ:** How?

**OBLEDO:** Well it got me involved in the issues of the day, mostly issues involving discrimination in employment, in housing, in health, in education etc. And some people claim that I became pretty bitter about it. I don't think I did. I think I always looked at the issues pretty objectively and tried to resolve them.

**VASQUEZ:** Who were some of your fellow classmates during those years at Texas, that you kept in touch with, or that went on to do the kinds of things that you were involved with?

**OBLEDO:** Well actually there [are] no Hispanic Americans there [are] a couple of Anglos that went to the school of pharmacy with me that I've kept in touch with since those days. They're very good people.

**VASQUEZ:** Give me some names?

**OBLEDO:** Bob Inland is one, [?] Hollingsworth is another.

**VASQUEZ:** Is this the Hollingsworth that served in the [California] assembly?

**OBLEDO:** No.



VASQUEZ: Is this where you started the first contact with LILAAC, or was it?

ORLEDO: It was my first contact with LILAAC. I went to the first convention in

1955 in Lubbock, Texas, and I recall in the general session I asked my

friend and I pitched for a second time part of my life for the rest of my

life to help in my community. And I think I've learned the people

VASQUEZ: Do you think that help helped you in your life?

ORLEDO: The question is...

VASQUEZ: How?

ORLEDO: Well it got me involved in the issues of the day, mostly issues involving

education, it was important in housing, in health, in education, and what

some people think that I became very busy. What is it that I did? I

think I think I was involved in the community, and tried to make

them

VASQUEZ: Who were some of your fellow students during those years in Texas?

Then you began to work with us and went on to do the kind of things that

you were involved with?

ORLEDO: Well actually there [was] no Hispanic American there [was] a couple of

African that went to the school in proximity with me that I've kept in

touch with since that time. I was a very good friend.

VASQUEZ: Give me some names?

ORLEDO: The typical name is [Hollingsworth] is another.

VASQUEZ: Is this the Hollingsworth that served in the [Civilian] service?

ORLEDO: No.

**VASQUEZ:** One thing that strikes me as interesting, why pharmacology? Why pharmacy?

**OBLEDO:** Because I had grown up in a pharmacy, worked in a pharmacy, stocking the supplies, etc. There was a pharmacist there by the name of Montemayor and another by the name of Palacios and they sort of kept track of me and sort of monitored my activities and encouraged me to go to the school of pharmacy.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you work for them while you were going to school?

**OBLEDO:** No. Actually the pharmacy was in San Antonio and I lived in Austin. Which is about 75 miles north of San Antonio.

**VASQUEZ:** How did you manage to go to college. You were one of the oldest, one of the older children right?

**OBLEDO:** No, I was almost at the bottom. There [are] four younger than I am.

**VASQUEZ:** Give me your brothers' and sister's names, starting with the oldest working down.

**OBLEDO:** Well Armando is the oldest boy, but he died of tuberculosis at the age 25 or so, and then there was Mike Obledo who is, by the way, survivor of the USS Indianapolis, a heavy cruiser that sunk the last two weeks of the war [WWII] with the loss of about 1,000 sailors.

**VASUQUEZ:** They just did a documentary on that...

**OBLEDO:** No, but they're developing a film now they're negotiating with Universal Studios for movie rights, production or something like that, about a movie



VASQUEZ: One thing that strikes me as interesting, why pharmacology? Why

pharmacology?

ORLEDO: Because I had grown up in a pharmacy, worked in a pharmacy, working

the register, and there was a pharmacist there by the name of

Pharmacist, and under the name of Pharmacist and they control the

kind of the kind of medicine my father and encouraged me to go

to the school of pharmacy.

VASQUEZ: But you work for them while you were going to school?

ORLEDO: Yes, actually the pharmacy was in San Antonio and I lived in Austin.

What is it? Is there something about Austin?

VASQUEZ: How do you manage to go to college? For someone who is not of

the elite class of the

ORLEDO: No, I was always in the bottom. That's just the way it was, that I was

VASQUEZ: But the poor families and there's a market among with the other

working class.

ORLEDO: Well, I was in the bottom, but he died of tuberculosis at the age of 12

or so, and then there was this family who was the only family of the

1925 generation, a family which was the last two years of the war

(1925) with the year of 1925 and 1926.

VASQUEZ: They are like the doctors, no they

ORLEDO: No, but they are doing a film now, they're working with Universal

Studio for movie rights, production or something like that, about a movie

**OBLEDO:** on the Indianapolis. There have been quite a few articles and stories about the ship.

**VASQUEZ:** So that is Armando, Mike...

**OBLEDO:** Mike, Jesus or Jessie we call him Chuy, there's myself, there's my younger brother, called by the name of Oscar, and yet there was another brother by the name of Homer, who died almost as an infant of infant diarrhea. So there [were] six boys in the family, two of them are dead now.

**VASQUEZ:** So how did you manage to be able to go the University of Texas at Austin from San Antonio?

**OBLEDO:** Well I had gentleman by the name of Mr. Franklin Jones who was there in San Antonio, who was a very, very strong Catholic and he took a liking to me and he helped me financially. There was also a doctor [?] Sawyer, from Ohio, who had been stationed in San Antonio during the war and I got to know his wife who worked at the hospital where I sold newspapers. So I got to know them and they also helped me a little bit. And then my sister, who was a nurse, by the name of Godelba, was the oldest.

**VASQUEZ:** What's her name?

**OBLEDO:** Godelba.

**VASQUEZ:** Godeleba?

**OBLEDO:** Godelba G-O-D-E-L-B-A, or something.

**VASQUEZ:** Is she the oldest?



on the telephone. There have been quite a few articles and stories about

the ship.

VASQUEZ: Is that all right, John?

ORLEDO: Well, I think we can say that's all right, John's my

younger brother called for the name of John, and yet there was another

brother in the name of Henry who had almost an equal of John

brother in the name of John, six years in the family, two of them

are dead now.

VASQUEZ: John, I'm sorry to be able to give the University of Texas a name

from San Antonio.

ORLEDO: Well, I had a question by the name of Mr. Vasquez who was there in

San Antonio, who was a very young Catholic and he took a liking to

me and he helped me financially. There was also a doctor [?] Storer.

John, who had been married in San Antonio during the war and I

got to know him who worked in the hospital where I sold newspapers.

So I got to know them and they also helped me a little bit. And then my

brother, who was named by the name of John, was the oldest.

VASQUEZ: What's his name?

ORLEDO: John.

VASQUEZ: John?

ORLEDO: John, O-D-E-L-A, a name.

VASQUEZ: Is he married?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, she's the oldest girl. She helped me a little bit. But I stayed in school about a year in a half and then I quit and joined the Navy.

**VASQUEZ:** You went in of your own volition.

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** You weren't drafted?

**OBLEDO:** No.

**VASQUEZ:** Why the Navy?

**OBLEDO:** Well my brother had been in the Navy and that's why I took a liking to the Navy. I thought I would follow in his footsteps.

**VASQUEZ:** And this was during the Korean Conflict?

**OBLEDO:** During the Korean conflict.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you ever go overseas?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, I was in Korea, in Japan, the Philippines, Okinawa, around the Pacific Ocean.

**VASQUEZ:** What was your most memorable experience while you were in the service?

**OBLEDO:** Well when I got into the service I was like a lot of young sailors. I started drinking beer. I started acting irresponsible, I had a lot of fun in the Navy. I got to know a lot of people from around the country etc. In fact, I [was] going to stay in the Navy. I thought about making a career when I got out. Except that when I got out I went back to the University so that changed my mind about going back into the Navy.

**VASQUEZ:** What did you learn about yourself in the service?



ORLEDO: Yes, she's the oldest girl. She helped me a little bit. But I stayed in school.

about a year in a jail and then I got out before the New

VASQUEZ: You went out of your own volition.

ORLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: You were a student.

ORLEDO: Yes.

VASQUEZ: Why the New?

ORLEDO: Well my father had been in the Navy and that's why I took a liking to the

Navy. I thought I would follow in his footsteps.

VASQUEZ: And this was during the Spanish-Cuban?

ORLEDO: During the Spanish-Cuban.

VASQUEZ: Did you ever go overseas?

ORLEDO: Oh yes, I was in Korea in Japan, the Philippines, Okinawa, and the

Pacific Ocean.

VASQUEZ: What was your most interesting experience while you were in the

service?

ORLEDO: Well when I got into the service I was like a lot of young fellows. I wanted

something new. I wanted some new things. I had a lot of fun in the Navy.

I got to know a lot of people from around the country. So I had a lot of

going to and from the Navy. I thought it was really a great time when I got out.

Except that when I got out I went back to the University to finish my degree.

my mind about going back into the Navy.

VASQUEZ: What did you learn about yourself in the service?

**OBLEDO:** Well not really very much about myself, except that I thought I'd go back to school, try to get a degree. Since I had not been an officer in the Navy, I had been an enlisted person and you need a college degree in order to be an officer. So I thought I had better get educated.

**VASQUEZ:** What did you learn about other people, especially about other Americans, in the Navy?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I learned that you could really get along with everybody, all kinds of people. It was the first time that I had been in an Anglo setting, except for the University. When I went up to the University I got thrown into an Anglo setting. But I learned that they were not all bigoted or prejudiced, that there were a lot of fine people amongst the Anglos.

**VASQUEZ:** So you decided to go back to the University of Texas and you finished your degree in pharmacology is that right?

**OBLEDO:** That's right, in pharmacy.

**VASQUEZ:** In pharmacy, and you went to work in that field?

**OBLEDO:** I went to work as a pharmacist in San Antonio and I worked as a pharmacist before I enrolled in law school.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you work with any of these people that you mentioned before, Palacios or Montemayor?

**OBLEDO:** No, they were gone from the pharmacy at that time. But I did go back to work for another person who worked there by the name of [?] Henry, Mr. Henry.

**VASQUEZ:** Mr. Henry?



ORLEDO: Well, my really very much about myself, except that I thought I was back.

in school, my to get a degree. Since I had not been an officer in the Navy, I

had been an enlisted person and you need a college degree in order to be

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people. It was the first time that I had been in an Anglo setting except for

the University. When I went up to the University, I had known him as

Anglo people. But I learned that they were not all bigoted or prejudiced.

the first was a lot of his people around the Anglos.

VASQUEZ: So you studied at the time in the University of Texas and graduated

your degree in the University of the South?

ORLEDO: That's right in the Navy.

VASQUEZ: In chemistry, and you went to work in the field.

ORLEDO: I went to work as a chemist in the Navy and I worked as a

chemist before I worked in the Navy.

VASQUEZ: Did you work with any of these people that you mentioned before,

friends or acquaintances?

ORLEDO: No, they were people from the University of Texas. But I did go back to

work for another person who worked there for the same old, I think, the

same

VASQUEZ: So that's

OSLEDO: Yes.

VASQUEZ: How did San Antonio look to you after being in the service?

OSLEDO: Well it was a city with a lot of Mexican-Americans, so I felt comfortable there. You know, the social clubs were Mexican-American. Even in public life, there were a lot of Mexican-Americans involved. Henry [D.]

Gonzales became involved in political affairs in the city. He was almost the first one. He won a seat on the city council, later became a Congressman. He's always been at the forefront of civil rights.

VASQUEZ: Was there a sense that a generation, I guess let me put it that way, a generation of youth were going to make things different? Was that evident already?

OSLEDO: I thought so. I think that a lot of people that were my age or younger were willing to get involved in the struggle for civil rights. And that was about the time that [John F.] Kennedy was elected and President Kennedy, so you probably recall the sight under a lot of people to get involved in public service. If anything was encouraged, it was a sign of encouragement, for people. That was part of his leadership.

VASQUEZ: How old were you when John Kennedy was elected?

OSLEDO: Well 1960, I was born in '32, I was almost 30, I was 28.

VASQUEZ: And you got that same feeling that Kennedy projected to other people?

OSLEDO: No question about it. He made a strong impact on me, as he did on a lot of people that I was growing up with.





**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** How did San Antonio look to you after being in the service?

**OBLEDO:** Well it was a city with a lot of Mexican-Americans, so I felt comfortable there. You know, the social clubs were Mexican-American. Even in public life, there were a lot of Mexican-Americans involved. Henry [B.] Gonzales became involved in political affairs in the city. He was almost the first one. He won a seat on the city council, later became a Congressman. He's always been at the forefront of civil rights.

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**OBLEDO:** No question about it. He made a strong impact on me, as he did on a lot of people that I was growing up with.



OSLEDO: Yes

VASQUEZ: How did the American look to you after being in the service?

OSLEDO: Well it was a very nice lot of American-Americans, and the Americans

that I saw there, the whole thing was very interesting. Even in public

life there were a lot of American-Americans involved. Many of

the things became involved in political affairs in the city. He was almost

the first one. He was a very nice person, but he was a

Congressman. He was a very nice person in the position of a

VASQUEZ: Well, there is a question of a question. I want to ask you a

question. You were going to make things different. Was that

what you were doing?

OSLEDO: I thought so. I thought that the people that were my age or younger were

wishing to get involved in the struggle for civil rights. And that was what

the time that John F. Kennedy was elected and President Kennedy was

very quickly elected. It was a very nice lot of people to get involved in

and to make it a very nice lot of people. It was a very nice

movement for people. That was part of the leadership

VASQUEZ: How did you feel when John Kennedy was elected?

OSLEDO: Well, I was born in '45, I was a child. I was 18.

VASQUEZ: And you got the same feeling that Kennedy projected to other people?

OSLEDO: The feeling about it. He made a very strong impact on me as he did on a lot of

people that I was growing up with.

**VASQUEZ:** Were you involved with LULAC all through school and when you went back to work in San Antonio, as a pharmacist?

**OBLEDO:** Yes I was.

**VASQUEZ:** In what capacity?

**OBLEDO:** Well I became an officer. I've served in every capacity in LULAC At the local level, at the state level, and at the national level. As you may be aware, I was the national president of LULAC in 1985.

**VASQUEZ:** Right, we're going to come back to that, but I want to get in more detail. At that time, did you know how LULAC got started?

**OBLEDO:** Well yes I learned, I studied the history of LULAC, and I read the constitution of the organization and to this day I claim that that document is one of the most noble documents ever written.

**VASQUEZ:** Did LULAC have an appeal to a broad range of the community or only to a certain segment of community in San Antonio?

**OBLEDO:** Well LULAC was a very conservative organization at that time, so it only had a limited appeal to our people.

**VASQUEZ:** What were the organizations at the time that were also making an impact on the community, do you remember?

**OBLEDO:** Well the G.I. Forum was one and then in San Antonio we had a political association, the Mexican American Political Association [MAPA] that was making an impact.

**VASQUEZ:** Why did you decide to go to law school?



VASQUEZ: Were you involved with LAFAC at that school and when you were

back to work in San Antonio as a pharmacist?

ORLEBO: That was

VASQUEZ: Is that correct?

ORLEBO: Well, because as officer I've worked every capacity in LAFAC at the

local level, at the state level and at the national level. As you may be

aware, I was the national president of LAFAC in 1987.

VASQUEZ: Right, we're going to come back to that, but I want to get in your head,

at that time, did you know how LAFAC got started?

ORLEBO: Well, yes, I was a part of the history of LAFAC, and I read the

constitution of the organization and to this day I claim that document

is one of the most noble documents ever written.

VASQUEZ: Did LAFAC have an appeal to a broad range of the community or only to

a certain segment of community in San Antonio?

ORLEBO: Well, LAFAC was a very broad-based organization at that time, so it only

had a limited appeal to our people.

VASQUEZ: When were the organizations at the time that were also making an appeal

on the community, do you remember?

ORLEBO: Well, the GLC, I think was one and then in San Antonio we had a political

association, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA).

Was it during that time?

VASQUEZ: Yes, that was during that time.

**OBLEDO:** Because I was very unhappy as a pharmacist. I worked for a gentleman whom I don't think was the kind of person that I would like to work for, when I got to be 60. So figured I'd go to law school and become independent, as independent as I possibly could. And that's why I enrolled in law school.

**VASQUEZ:** Saint Mary's [University]?

**OBLEDO:** Saint Mary's, in San Antonio.

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me what Saint Mary's was like when you got there? How many Hispanics were going to school there?

**OBLEDO:** There was, I forget, I would say there was ten to fifteen percent Hispanic students in the law school. The law school was located downtown, in a temporary building. But Saint Mary's has graduated more Hispanic lawyers than any university in America. I think I'm correct in that.

**VASQUEZ:** Why do you think that is?

**OBLEDO:** Because of San Antonio. It was based in San Antonio and there's a large Mexican-American population there in south Texas.

**VASQUEZ:** Was there anyone in law school that particularly had an impact on you and your way of thinking, your way of interpreting law, or planning to use the law?

**OBLEDO:** No, there was no professor that had an impact on me at that school. Some students probably did. There were a couple of them that were very bright persons, very articulate etc. and they used to encourage me.

**VASQUEZ:** Can you think of the names of [any] of them?





**OBLEDO:** Smith was one, Arthur Smith.

**VASQUEZ:** Anybody else?

**OBLEDO:** Well I can't remember their names now, but there were a couple of others.

**VASQUEZ:** There too you were involved in political or civic activities, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** What activities would those have been, and in what groups?

**OBLEDO:** Well I was involved with the LULAC I was a civil rights officer. So we used to take on some of the people, some of the companies in San Antonio. For instance I recall taking on the City Public Service Board who discriminated, who had no Hispanics working in management. And every one on their labor force, putting up the poles and digging the holes, was Hispanic, and all the supervisors were Anglo. So I went to them to bring the situation to their attention, how unfair this was and the general manager asked me. "What, do you think we all are racist?" I said, "No I don't think you all are racist, but I think there may be some Anglos that might want to be laborers and they can't be because all you do is hire Mexican- Americans as laborers. So now the City's Public Service Board has half Mexican-Americans on its board.

It is a totally different situation now in San Antonio. We also took on the telephone company. They didn't hire Mexican-American operators because they said they had a strong accent. So I told the general manager, "You're telling me then that you wouldn't hire Mrs. Lyndon Johnson



OBLEBO: That was one, Arthur.

VASQUEZ: Any more?

OBLEBO: Well, I can't remember that exact one, but there were a couple of others.

VASQUEZ: There are two more involved, is that right?

OBLEBO: Right.

VASQUEZ: What activities would it be have been and in what groups?

OBLEBO: Well, I was involved with the LULAC. I was a well-known officer. So we

went to take up arms of the people, some of the companies in San Antonio. The national council taking on the City Police Service Board who discriminated, who had no Hispanic working in management and even some on their lists, putting up the poles and rigging the poles were Hispanic, and all the organizations were Anglo. So I went to them to bring the situation to their attention. How unfair this was and the general manager asked me "What do you think we all are?" I said, "You're not." I think you're all the same. I think there may be some things that ought to be done to be fairer and they said, "He thought all you do is that." Antonio, Antonio, Antonio, Antonio. So now the City Police Service Board has had Hispanic members on the board.

This really different situation in San Antonio. It's also in the telephone company. They said, "This Mexican American company because they said they had a money order. So I told the general manager, 'You're talking to me that you want to be like a Mexican company.'

**OBLEDO:** right? Because she has a strong accent you could barely understand her.”

**VASQUEZ:** He didn’t say very much. But I wanted to draw a comparison.

**VASQUEZ:** So this is while you were a law student?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** What year did you get your degree, in 1960 I guess?

**OBLEDO:** 1960.

**VASQUEZ:** Same year as John Kennedy was elected?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** So you were a young man with a law degree, what were you going to do with it?

**OBLEDO:** Well I was going to try to defend the rights of the people. I was a real idealist; I wanted to help everybody secure their rights. Police, particularly some police officers in San Antonio who were very brutal in our community. But then there was the job discrimination. Like I tell you, there’s an institution in San Antonio called Luby’s Cafeteria. At one time they used to advertise in the newspapers “Anglos only” when advertising for jobs. And indeed they only hired Anglos. So I started a battle with them, telling them they ought to hire Mexican-Americans. We were a good part of the community etc. And now you ought to see it, it’s almost all Mexican-Americans.

**VASQUEZ:** You went into private practice is that right?

**OBLEDO:** I did, for about a year.

**VASQUEZ:** Whom did you practice with?



right? Because she has a strong accent you could barely understand her."

He didn't say very much. But I wanted to draw a comparison.

VASQUEZ: So this is while you were a law student?

ORLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: When you did you get your degree in 1965 I guess?

ORLEDO: 1965.

VASQUEZ: Some year at San Francisco was that?

ORLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: So you were a young man with a law degree, what were you going to do

with it?

ORLEDO: Well I was going to try to defend the rights of the people. I was a real

idealistic. I wanted to help everybody, defend their rights, fighting particularly

some police officers in San Antonio who were very brutal in our

community. The time there was the job discrimination. I did a real

great job in San Antonio. In San Antonio called I was a Captain. At that time

they used to discriminate in the workplace "Negroes only," when advertising

for jobs. And indeed they were. And I started a battle with

them, telling them that ought to have Hispanic-Americans. We were a

good part of the community, and now you ought to see it. It's almost

all Mexican-Americans.

VASQUEZ: You were two years past your law degree?

ORLEDO: I did for about a year.

VASQUEZ: When did you graduate with?

**OBLEDO:** A fellow by the name of Frank Suthers, Frank Hill, ...Mayo Galindo.

**VASQUEZ:** What's the first name?

**OBLEDO:** Mayo, M-A-Y-O.

**VASQUEZ:** Yes. Galindo.

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** What kind of law did you [practice]?

**OBLEDO:** It was general practice of law. I used to handle all kinds of cases;  
accidents, divorces, wills, whatever.

**VASQUEZ:** And then how long would did last?

**OBLEDO:** About a year.

**VASQUEZ:** And then?

**OBLEDO:** Then I went to the Attorney General's office in Texas, in Austin Texas.

**VASQUEZ:** This was what, 1965, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** 1965. How did that assignment, or how did that appointment, come about?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I knew the sheriff in San Antonio pretty well. He really liked me. In fact he told me that he felt like I was his son. And he recommended me to the Attorney General for a job. So I got the job.

**VASQUEZ:** And what did you do there, what was your duty there?

**OBLEDO:** I was in the tax division. Filing lawsuits for delinquent taxes etc. and then I dealt a little bit with insurance. So it was a learning process for me.

**VASQUEZ:** And how long were you there?

**OBLEDO:** I was there until 1968.



OSLEDO: A fellow by the name of Frank Johnson, Frank Hill, - maybe Calhoun.

VASQUEZ: What's his first name?

OSLEDO: Mike, Mike-V-O.

VASQUEZ: Yes, Calhoun.

OSLEDO: Yes.

VASQUEZ: What kind of law did you practice?

OSLEDO: I was general practice at law, I used to handle all kinds of cases.

VASQUEZ: And then you went to work for the government, didn't you?

VASQUEZ: And then you went to work for the government, didn't you?

OSLEDO: And then you went to work for the government, didn't you?

VASQUEZ: And then you went to work for the government, didn't you?

OSLEDO: Then I went to the Attorney General's office in Texas in Austin, Texas.

VASQUEZ: This was when 1963, was it not?

OSLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: Now, how did that relationship develop? How did that relationship develop?

OSLEDO: Well, I knew the family in the Attorney General's office. He really liked me in

fact he told me that he felt like I was his son. And he recommended me to

the Attorney General, and I got the job.

VASQUEZ: And when did you do that, when was your first job?

OSLEDO: I was in the law office, I think I was in the Attorney General's office, and then

I went to work for the Attorney General, for a while, I was a deputy attorney for me.

VASQUEZ: And how long was your first job?

OSLEDO: I was there until 1967.

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me, what it was like in the mid-nineteen sixties, being a Mexican-American attorney in Texas, in the Attorney General's office.

**OBLEDO:** Well, the Attorney General's office was a good place to work. Actually there were about five of us there, out of a total of about sixty. The Attorney General was a very kind person, very sensitive, so I got to travel throughout the state on these cases. So I learned a lot, grew a lot, and learned a lot about the state of Texas at the same time.

**VASQUEZ:** What is it that you did, or were doing, that brought you to the attention of the people involved with [the] organization of MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense Fund).

**OBLEDO:** Well I knew Pete Tijerina very well, and Pete Tijerina was one of the founders. So Pete approached me to be the General Counsel of MALDEF. And I declined, I said, "Well there's a few other people who can probably do better at General Counsel than I." But he said, "No, I want you." And I asked why and he said, "'Cause I trust you. I know that if you give me your word, that you'll keep it. I know that you will keep in-house secrets, in-house etc." So that is how I became the counsel.

**VASUQEZ:** Tell me what you know about how the organization got started, before you came on the scene?

**OBLEDO:** Well Pete Tijerina and a fellow by the name of [?] Padilla and Joe Bernal and a couple of other people...

**VASQUEZ:** Is this the Joe Bernal who became a [Texas State] senator?



VASQUEZ: Tell me, what is the main reason why you're a historian?

CHILDS: I think it's because I'm interested in the past.

CHILDS: Well, the American Government is a very young country. Actually,

there were about five or six hundred years of a kind of a pre-history.

American Government was very young, very young, very young, and not to have

throughout the time in the past. So I thought it was a very young

country, a lot about the past, and I was at the same time.

VASQUEZ: What is it that you did - were doing the history and the geography

the people lived with (and organization of the life) in the

American I feel like a young

CHILDS: Well I know how things were, and I was I think was one of the

history. So I was organized and in the United States of America.

And I decided, I said, "Well, there's a few other people who can probably

be better at the United States than I." So he said, "You're right." And I

asked why and he said, "Because I want you to know that it was given me

your name, that you're right. I know that you will keep it in your name.

in the past, the way I believe the world.

VASQUEZ: Tell me what you know about the organization of the United States

and the world?

CHILDS: Well, the United States and the world is a very young country.

and a couple of other people.

VASQUEZ: Is this the first time you've been in the United States?

**OBLEDO:** Yes sir. Pete Tijerina was trying a case south of San Antonio and he looked at the jury pool and they were all Anglos. So that's what drew his concern about the problem. And he approached the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense Fund which was headed by Jack Lindhugh. And he had told him about the situation and they recommended that they file for a grant through the Ford Foundation. So we did, and we got it.

**VASQUEZ:** It was a 2.2 million dollar grant, given to MALDEF. And the idea was for five years, is that correct?

**OBLEDO:** That's correct.

**VASQUEZ:** To begin to do...

**OBLEDO:** Civil rights work.

**VASQUEZ:** Civil rights work, in a very general phrasing of the work. What did you understand that to mean?

**OBLEDO:** Well, fighting discrimination in the areas of education and jobs and police brutality cases etc. Everywhere where we did not receive equal treatment.

**VASQUEZ:** The atmosphere of the time, I would imagine had something to do with the direction that you took, right? I'm saying there was a Civil Rights movement going all over the country.

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes.

**VASQUEZ:** A lot of activism, a lot of anti-war activism, was beginning. Do you think that had something to do with some of the success that you had?

**OBLEDO:** Well no question about it. In many cases discrimination was so obvious, that it was like picking apples off a tree. We'd file law suites and we'd win



ORLEDO: Yes, the first thing was to get a good look at the house and the  
looked at the first part and then went to the kitchen. So that's what I saw.  
remains about the kitchen and he approached the K.A.A.C.P. house.  
Edna's first wife was killed by the K.A.A.C.P. And he had not been  
about the situation and that was something that I saw for a year.  
through the first part of the year. So we did not see him.  
VASQUEZ: It was a 12 million dollar house given to the K.A.A.C.P. And the house was for  
the house is 12 million.  
ORLEDO: That's correct.  
VASQUEZ: To what?  
ORLEDO: One million.  
VASQUEZ: One million was a very small part of the house. What did you  
understand that to mean?  
ORLEDO: Well, saying that money is the same as education and jobs and profits.  
because even the K.A.A.C.P. house was the same as the house of the K.A.A.C.P.  
VASQUEZ: The house of the K.A.A.C.P. house had something to do with the  
house that you took right? Because that was a very big house.  
house was given all over the country.  
ORLEDO: Oh, yes.  
VASQUEZ: A lot of money was given to the K.A.A.C.P. house. So that  
that was something to do with money of the house that you had.  
ORLEDO: Well, the house was given to many other people. So that was  
that it was the house of the K.A.A.C.P. house. And the house was given to many

them, right off the bat. For instance there was a public swimming pool in Marlin, Texas.

**VASQUEZ:** Morgan?

**OBLEDO:** Marlin, M-A-R-L-I-N. I went up there and I tried to swim and they wouldn't let me swim. It was a public swimming pool. One of the local judges sat on the swimming pool committee. So I went to him and I said "Well how could you be on that committee? When you took the oath of office, upholding the Constitution of the United States? And yet you all discriminate. You don't let Blacks or Hispanics in your pool!" And he said, "Well I didn't know this was going on." "Well it is going on." They decided not to open the pool up to minorities. So we went to court and won that case hands down. So we de-segregated that pool. But I mean so many of the cases were so open and obvious, that they were easy to win.

**VASQUEZ:** As specific as you can remember, what did you think you were going to be able to accomplish, as general counsel of MALDEF?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I thought since I was an idealist, we could change the scheme of things in the United States, get rid of discrimination, so to speak, in all these areas of concern. Give our people more opportunity and a better life as a result thereof. But the problems are still here; a lot of the problems are still here. Who can figure out human behavior and the way people act sometimes? It's indescribable!

**VASQUEZ:** Let me read to you from an autobiographical statement that you wrote. I found it in your papers and tell me if this sort of ran into some of the



that night of the day, for instance there was a public swimming pool in

Madrid, Spain.

VASQUEZ: Morgan?

ORLEDO: Right, M-A-R-I-A-M, I went up there and I used to swim and play

swimsuits, for instance, it was a public swimming pool, this is the pool

right at the swimming pool entrance. So I went to that and I said

"Well how could you be on that entrance? How can you be on that

entrance, right at the entrance of the United States? And you are all

discovering, you are the Blacks or Hispanics in your pool?" And he

said, "Well I do know the way going on." Well it is going on. The

school is not to open the pool up to students. So we went to that and

went that way back. I went to the swimming pool and I went to

many of the cases were so many and obvious that they were easy to see.

VASQUEZ: As regards to your own report, what do you think you were going to

be able to accomplish at your school at A.L.I.D.E.T?

ORLEDO: Well I thought that I was an excellent teacher, the director of

things in the United States, but it was not what I thought it was. It was

that time of violence. Our own people were oppressed and a great big

as a result thereof. But the violence was not what I thought it was. It was

the way. With our people and our people and the way people

concerned a human being.

VASQUEZ: Let me read to you from a newspaper article that you wrote. I

found it in your paper and it was this way. It was about the

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

idealism that you're talking about? You say "My responsibilities to the thirty-five member board of directors comprised of renowned lawyers, law professors, law school deans...."

[End Tape 1, Side A]



identify the person or persons who are the  
primary members of the family and of the  
community and of the church.

(End Tape 1, Side A)

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

**VASQUEZ:** ...and distinguished public and private citizens included: Analysis, interpretation of pertinent federal and state legislation applicable to MALDEF; development of recommendations relative to organization policy and posture; conceptualization of problems and needs of client community; initiation of plan and procedures in program development; establishment of litigation priorities; preparation and submission of program and funding proposals to perspective donors such as business corporations and foundations; preparation of annual budget; assuring compliance with funding agencies; policies and regulations and conditions; development and training of staff; execution of all faces of personal management, including appointment and termination; preparation; planning and program manual; personnel policy; bylaws; annual reports and board of staff structures and relationships; execution of contracts; development and maintenance of public relations; and community identity campaign." Did that cut into the idealism of doing a lot of litigation?

**OBELDO:** No it did not. I carried on those responsibilities rather well, I thought. But I still litigated a lot.

**VASQUEZ:** So [you were] Executive Director and then you were the General



VASQUEZ:

... and developed public and private economic activities / analysis  
interpretation of present trends and their legislative application in  
MEXICO, development of economic indicators relative to  
regulation policy and business concentration of problems and  
study of their community relations of place and elsewhere in  
program development, establishment of long range priorities  
preparation and submission of program and funding proposals to  
prospective donors such as business corporations and foundations  
preparation of annual budget of agency compliance with funding  
agencies, policies and regulations and evaluation development and  
monitoring of staff, execution of all forms of personnel management  
including organization and supervision of personnel, planning and  
program control, personnel policy by their internal events and  
based on staff structure and administrative evaluation of resources  
development and maintenance of administrative and community  
relations programs. The first one was the foundation of being a total  
organization.

DELBOS:

So a director I would be those responsibilities then well, I  
think that I will list a few  
The first was Executive Director and then you were the General

VASQUEZ:

Counsel, is that the way it was?

**OBLEDO:**

Right, except that in 1970, because of the all cases we were bringing in to Texas, a lot of the so-called "power structure" in the state of Texas, including San Antonio, brought pressure to the Ford Foundation, and the Ford Foundation came to us and said, "Look we are going to have to do something, we do not want to shut you down, but why don't you all move the national office elsewhere, out of San Antonio, out of Texas, so that we can keep funding you." "Otherwise we won't be able to fund you anymore." So we decided to move the office to San Francisco and Pete Tijerina, who was the executive director, didn't care to move from San Antonio. So I was appointed President and the General Counsel. So in effect, I became the Executive Director.

**VASQUEZ:**

Can you tell me more specific... who or what elements in that so-called power structure could wield so much power in New York City, say at the Ford Foundation?

**OBELDO:**

Well there was the Mayor of San Antonio and a certain Mr. McAlister and all the prominent people in businesses in San Antonio who were mostly Anglos, all Anglos, brought pressure on the Ford Foundation. In fact, they started putting out bumper stickers. People were under the misconception that the Ford Foundation was funded by the Ford Motor Company, and it is not.



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Control is the way a word.  
Right, except that in 1970, because of the 20 years we were  
bringing in to Texas, a lot of the so-called "power structure" in the  
state of Texas, including the Governor, and the members of the  
Legislature and the Texas Board of Education, in fact, I said  
we are going to have to do something, we are not going to let you  
down, but why don't you all move the national office  
out of San Antonio, out of Texas, so that we can keep looking for  
Ogilvie? We may not be able to find him anymore. So I wanted  
to invite the office to San Francisco and I told the people who were the  
executive director, that I was to move from San Antonio. So I was  
opposed to the idea and the National Council, so in effect I became

the Executive Director

VASQUEZ:

Did you tell anyone specific who or what changes in the  
called your position and what we were doing in New York

Did you at the time?

ORLDO:

Well, there was the Mayor of San Antonio and a number of  
McAllen and all the western people in the state in San  
Antonio who were really looking at things, people, because in  
the Texas Legislature is that they wanted people who thought  
about things were with the movement, and the fact  
movement was pushed by the Texas State Community and a lot

But anyway, they put out bumper stickers, "Support Hate, Buy a Ford"

**VASQUEZ:** Oh really?

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you ever save one of those?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes.

**VASQUEZ:** Is there one in your papers?

**OBLEDO:** There [is] someplace

**VASQUEZ:** So how did that go again?

**OBLEDO:** "Support Hate, Buy a Ford"

**VASQUEZ:** Before we get to the move to San Francisco, I'm interested in the experiences that you had setting up field offices in the other parts of the United States. I'm particularly interested in my home state of New Mexico. But tell me what you can about the other set of offices, in the other parts of the country.

**OBLEDO:** Well we surveyed the country and found out where there was more activity than anywhere else. We started off by looking up an office in Los Angeles. There was our first office. And then from there we proceeded to Chicago, and then finally we thought we'd have an office in Washington D.C. because of the government there and the Capitol and all the politicians there, and that's what we did. And in Los Angeles there was a lot of activity. There were a lot of groups



But anyway, they got our picture and they "supposed" that they a  
 For  
 On page 1  
 Yes  
 Did you ever see any of them?  
 On page 1  
 Is there one in your picture?  
 There (his) one?  
 So how did that go again?  
 "Supposed" that they "supposed"  
 Before we got to the house in San Francisco, I was interested in the  
 experience, the way that things are going on in the other parts of  
 the United States. I'm particularly interested in my home town of  
 New Mexico. But tell me what you can about the other part of  
 it, as in the other parts of the country.  
 Well, we started in the city and found out what they were doing  
 actually then anywhere else. We started out by looking upon what  
 in Los Angeles. There was a lot of activity. And then from there we  
 proceeded to Chicago and then finally to the thought we'd have an  
 office in Washington D.C. because of the government there and the  
 I spent most of the afternoon there and then I went to the city and in  
 Los Angeles there was a lot of activity. There was a lot of people

in the barrio, a lot of newspapers being printed. I think almost a hundred of them. So we decided not to locate the office in Los Angeles because everybody would be coming to our offices and we would never get to do very much.

**VASQUEZ:** You would never get out of Los Angeles?

**OBLEDO:** Right, so that's why we decided on San Francisco.

**VASQUEZ:** Ok, the term "neutral" is used in the history of MALDEF, as far as a neutral territory. What were your experiences in Colorado?

**OBLEDO:** In Colorado I worked with Rocky [Rodolfo "Corky"] Gonzalez, and similar groups in Denver.

**VASQUEZ:** Corky, you mean?

**OBLEDO:** Corky Gonzalez. And [other] groups in Denver on, discrimination etc., cases – school cases.

**VASQUEZ:** Did the more established Mexican-American attorneys help out in these [cases]?

**OBLEDO:** Well yes, in Colorado they did, yes.

**VASQUEZ:** How about in New Mexico?

**OBLEDO:** Well [State Representative] Raymond Sanchez, he was the Speaker...

**VASQUEZ:** Speaker of the House, right?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, he was involved with us, and [Senator Manny] Aragon in the Senate...





**VASQUEZ:** Manny Aragon?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, he was very much involved with us,...

**VASQUEZ:** What about Graciela Olivares?

**OBLEDO:** Graciela Olivares, she was a member of the board, very active, very articulate. There was a fellow from the Albuquerque area, a very well known lawyer in Albuquerque, I forget his last name now, he was very much involved with us.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you get any opposition by the more established Hispanic groups there?

**OBLEDO:** No.

**VASQUEZ:** Nowhere? Did you pretty much get support [from everyone]?

**OBLEDO:** Not that I recall.

**VASQUEZ:** Why was an office maintained there only until 1976. Why did that close down, do you know?

**OBLEDO:** Where is that?

**VASQUEZ:** In Albuquerque.

**OBLEDO:** I didn't know they had a regional office in Albuquerque; they must have opened it way after I left.

**VASQUEZ:** After you left, tell me what you think [you accomplished] in the five years you were with MALDEF, what were the most important victories?

**OBLEDO:** Well, we had some school discrimination, school segregation cases



VASQUEZ: Many things.

ORLEDO: Yes, he was very much involved with us.

VASQUEZ: I'm about Olan's character.

ORLEDO: Olan's character, she was a member of the board, very active, very

enthusiastic. There was a fellow from the Albuquerque area, a very

well known lawyer in Albuquerque, I forgot his last name now, he

was very much involved with us.

VASQUEZ: Did you get any opposition by the more established Hispanic

groups there?

ORLEDO: Not really.

VASQUEZ: How about the property itself and support for it in general?

ORLEDO: Not that I recall.

VASQUEZ: Why did you not mention that early on? Why did you

leave that out?

ORLEDO: What is that?

VASQUEZ: In Albuquerque.

ORLEDO: I don't know that had a regional office in Albuquerque, they were

into general, it was about 1980.

VASQUEZ: After you left, tell me what you think (you were involved) in the

five years you were with MAL DER, what were the main

important things?

ORLEDO: Well, we had some school construction, school expansion cases.

in El Paso, in San Antonio, and elsewhere around the country. We had some draft cases. That was during the Viet Nam war. Young people were being drafted, and they felt that the Mexican-Americans were being discriminated against, and we had some job cases against big corporations [like] Bank of America. So I think we did a lot of good.

**VASQUEZ:** Some observers claim that *Serna vs. Portales Board of Education* <sup>1</sup>, on municipal schools I guess, was a critical case, why?

**OBLEDO:** Because it sort have equalized the educational opportunities for Hispanics in New Mexico.

**VASQUEZ:** This was a case in which, it was argued that so long as no bilingual or bicultural education was afforded people of another culture or who predominantly spoke another language, that they would be held of a disadvantage...

**OBLEDO:** Right, they would be deprived.

**VASQUEZ:** And this opened up a lot of terrain, and probably even affected cases later on like *Lau vs. Nichols* <sup>2</sup>. Is that right?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, that's right.

**VASQUEZ:** I guess what I'm trying to lead up to, is that in the last two or three years in New Mexico, a group of parents, including Hispanics, have

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<sup>1</sup> (1974) *Serna et, al. v. Portales Municipal Schools, et al. vs. District Court of New Mexico*, No. 8994

<sup>2</sup> (1974) *Lau et al. v. Nichols et al. Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit*, No. 72-6520



in El Paso, in San Antonio, and elsewhere around the country. We  
had some great cases. Then we found the Yip Man was Young  
people were being drilled and they felt that the Mexican  
Americans were being discriminated against, and we had some job  
cases against big corporations. That kind of, incident, so I think  
we did a lot of good.

Some of them after the time of the death of Martin Luther  
King, Jr. I guess, was a critical case, was it?

Because it was about the time of the assassination of Martin Luther  
King, Jr. I guess.

This was a case in which it was argued that we were an illegal  
or discriminatory organization was an illegal group of people, and we  
were prohibited from having any kind of organization, that is, we  
had no leadership.

Right, they would be illegal.

And this opened up a lot of trouble and probably even related  
cases later on the law of federal, is that right?

Yes, that's right.

I guess when I was trying to look up the law in the law firm or there  
was in New Mexico, a group of people, including Hispanics, have

(1970) Summary of a hearing conducted by the House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, 91st Congress, 1st Session, 1969.  
(1970) Summary of a hearing conducted by the House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, 91st Congress, 1st Session, 1969.  
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sued the Albuquerque Public Schools to do away with bilingual education, and two sisters who taught Chicano Studies, or Chicano History in Vaughn, New Mexico were fired and it became kind of a "cause célèbre". It seems like we've gone full circle. Do you feel that way?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, sometimes I do.

**VASQUEZ:** Is it demoralizing to you sometimes?

**OBLEDO:** You know we fought a lot of cases [against] segregation because the Mexicans were sent to one particular school etc. Not too long ago I advocated that we ought to have a separate school system. Have Hispanic schools, with teachers, and the professors, etc. We wouldn't have to compete against anybody else, but ourselves, and then we would graduate people to go to colleges, etc. So I think we've gone full circle.

**VASQUEZ:** What kind of response did you get to that, sort of "separatist" notion?

**OBLEDO:** Well we really didn't get a response to it, no. I sure didn't.

**VASQUEZ:** In what areas do you think MALDEF made the most gains in those five years that you were there?

**OBLEDO:** I think in education.

**VASQUEZ:** In education?

**OBLEDO:** Yes.



and the Americans I took schools to do work with children  
education and two weeks with English (Spanish, English or Chinese)  
History in Virginia New Mexico were there and it became kind of a  
"crazy culture" it seems like we're going to make. Do you find

the way?

Yes, sometimes I do.

Is it something you're interested in?

You know we thought a lot of times (perhaps) something because  
the Mexicans were sent to us, I think they were sent to us long  
ago I think. I think they were sent to us a separate school system  
have been in schools with teachers and the professors, the  
students I have to compare against the other side for centuries and  
then we would find that people go to colleges, the 50-1 thing

we're going to make.

What kind of response did you get to that?

of "perhaps" action?

That was really what I got a response to, and I was doing.

Is there a way to go back to the 50-1 thing?

That's what you were doing.

I think it's a question.

is it a question?

Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** But you also took on draft cases.

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes.

**VASQUEZ:** And you also took on police brutality cases.

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** And you took on voting cases.

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** You challenged jury selection.

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** In fact, when one reads the initial report, that you submitted on the activities of MALDEF right before you left, I stopped Xeroxing the list of 60 some-cases, over 50 cases. Was that a caseload that was realistic?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, it was. Actually we could have taken on a lot more cases, but we were pretty slow at what we did. Yes, we wanted to win. And the.... (Inaudible), in other words we wanted somebody who had a complaint and used it, we had a legitimate complaint. And then we could do something about it.

**VASQUEZ:** So you would pick cases that you thought that you had a good chance of winning?

**OBLEDO:** Right. We had a police brutality case that we won't forget in Lubbock, Texas where this young person had been arrested and taken to jail, and his arm had been broken, and the policeman said,



VASQUEZ: The police took control of the area.

ORLEDO: On the way.

VASQUEZ: And you saw the police taking control of the area.

ORLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: And you saw the police taking control of the area.

ORLEDO: Yes.

VASQUEZ: You saw the police taking control of the area.

ORLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: In fact, when you read the initial report, that was referred to the activities of the GSE, right before you left, I suppose, looking for the 100 - some cases, over 20 cases. Was that a case that was referred?

ORLEDO: Yes, it was. Actually, we could have taken on a lot more cases, but we were pretty short at that time. We were short on men. And the... (hesitates) in other words, we didn't know who had a telephone and we had a telephone company. And then we could do something about it.

VASQUEZ: So you would not know that you thought that you had a good chance of doing it.

ORLEDO: Right. We had a better feeling that we were going to get it.

VASQUEZ: I was where the young person had been arrested and taken to jail, and he was just from the area, and the policeman said

VASQUEZ: that he was trying to be pulled away from the bars and he was hanging on the bars and his arm got broken. We proved that there was no way that the fracture had to be... had to have had his arm behind him and pulled up to cause that kind of fracture. So we won that case, on police brutality.

VASQUEZ: Employment discrimination. What sticks out in your mind that is a victory that you think went on to be substantial, maybe even precedent-setting?

OBLEDO: Well the Public Utility Service Company was one.

VASQUEZ: In Texas, right?

OBLEDO: The General Telephone Company was another.

VASQUEZ: Did you get criticism, or opposition, by more conservative elements of the community when you started defending people like Rosalio Muñoz, or some of the other people that dodged, that opposed the draft?

OBLEDO: Sure, yes. There was a lot of criticism. [But] we were doing the right thing.

VASQUEZ: That was your response?

OBLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: Did you ever get, complaints that you were too, too "activist," too "radical?"

OBLEDO: Yes, I got those complaints all my life.





**VASQUEZ:** Let me read you something and I want you to have an opportunity to address. When one goes to Stanford University to go through the MALDEF papers. There is a summary of what all the papers hold, and it runs twenty-some pages. But on page nineteen of that summary, it gets to 1973 and it says the following, "In 1973 Obledo resigned, in part because of negative rulings that MALDEF received on important litigation under his leadership, the board then hired Vilma Martinez to replace Obledo and..." Then it goes on talking about Martinez's background. Is that a fair or unfair assessment?

**OBLEDO:** I think it's an unfair assessment. I'd like for them to point out what bad rulings we got...

**VASQUEZ:** That's what led me to, to look at the cases, but your feeling is that, this is a poor reading of the record.

**OBLEDO:** I think so.

**VASQUEZ:** Anything else more that you want to say about that, or put on the record?

**OBLEDO:** No, I'd been in MALDEF five years already, I thought that it was time to move on.

**VASQUEZ:** Why?

**OBLEDO:** Well because, I'd gotten an offer to teach at the Harvard Law School at that time. I'd met the dean. As you probably know,



Let me read you something and I want you to have an opportunity  
to object. When one goes to Belmont the way to go through the  
Mallory papers. There is a summary of what all the papers held  
and a new twenty-page paper. But we have minutes of that  
meeting. It goes to 1977 and a page the following. On 1973 October  
assigned to him because of negative history that MALLORY  
received an assignment. The question was not whether the record that  
that MALLORY received negative history and... Then it goes to  
MALLORY about MALLORY's background. It goes to a point on 1977  
conclusion.

VASQUEZ:

I think it's a good statement. I'd like to go to point on 1977  
and object to you.  
That's what I want to do. I'd like to go to point on 1977  
this is a good reading of the record.

ORLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

I think so.  
Reading the more that goes on to see what that says on the  
record.

ORLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

The TV show on MALLORY five years ago. I'd like to see  
that to read on.

ORLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

Well, I would like to see it. I'd like to see it. I'd like to see it.  
I'd like to see it. I'd like to see it. I'd like to see it.

ORLEDO:

MALDEF had a scholarship program. We helped young people go to law school. As a result of that scholarship which I administered, I'd gotten to know most of the deans around the country. And I got to become good friends with the dean at the Harvard Law School.

**VASQUEZ:** What was his name?

**OBLEDO:** Al Sachs

**VASQUEZ:** S-A-C-H-S?

**OBLEDO:** S-A-C-K-S. So he offered me a job at Harvard.

**VASQUEZ:** What kind of appointment was that?

**OBLEDO:** That was an appointment to the faculty teaching the introduction to constitutional law.

**VASQUEZ:** Was that a tenure track or a two-year appointment?

**OBLEDO:** No, it was tenured.

**VASQUEZ:** Lets go on. But I want to come back to this question of MALDEF later. When one reads the record of the transition, you refer to your years as the "dramatic years," in one of the MALDEF newsletters, in fact, in a speech that you gave. You called them the, "Dramatic years that will stay with me for rest of my life." And then when one reads the speech of the incoming general council, Vilma Martinez, and the language that she uses there is [the statement] that MALDEF has got to stop, and I'm paraphrasing now, trying to be everything to everybody, and begin to focus, narrow its focus and





concentrate on raising funds from corporations, and two or three other things, "We need to focus on education and job discrimination." Was there a change there?

**OBLEDO:** Yes there was a change...

**VASQUEZ:** When...

**OBLEDO:** When I was the General Counsel, I used to try to serve everybody.

For instance to Corky Gonzalez's group [Crusade for Justice], César Chávez. We were house counsel for those kinds of groups, we dealt a lot with street people, like community groups in Los Angeles, there [were] quite a few of them. So Vilma thought it took a lot of time and a lot of effort, and they weren't Hispanic. But I thought it was highly important to the Hispanic community.

**VASQUEZ:** There also is a phrase in that 1974 report which talks about "Choosing a leadership that could better deal with," what they called, "... the wave of conservatism and backlash." This was with the election, and I guess we begin to get a more conservative a backlash being articulated. Do you think that was part of the strategy of MALDEF, do you think that was part of the change?

**OBLEDO:** I think it was.

**VASQUEZ:** Now that you look back on it, twenty-some years later, was it a wise decision for them to do that?

**OBLEDO:** Well you got to know the situation. We needed money to operate,



consequence of seeing him from my window, and two or three

other things. "It's hard to be in an election and not

be interested." It's hard to be a change agent.

Yes, there was a change.

When

When I was the County Council, I was a big part of the

For instance, the County Council's group (I think it was

County Council. We were known around the state for a long

we dealt a lot with people who had different opinions. It was

Asking them (well) what they thought. The other thing is that

a lot of new and a lot of old, and they were a big part of

though it was highly important to the historic community.

That was a big part of the 1980s when we were

"Changing a leadership role and then we were" after that

called "the state of government and leadership." This was with

the election, and I think we began to see a new movement

leadership being established. The way that it was part of the

history of the state, so that that was part of the change.

I think we

Now we are not just in a state, we are in a state that is a

and looking for more to do that.

Well, you can be in the election. We needed to be in the

so [we] catered to corporations to help raise that money. And yet some of those corporations were our worst enemies. So you can't really bite the hand that feeds you, so you get into that situation, because of the funding. The funding priority tended to lessen our activities as activists. So that's what happens, and I find that very regrettable.

**VASQUEZ:** I know that when you were there you had [a case against] International Telephone and Telegraph Company, you were after some of the oil companies, and that pretty much stopped after you left, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** I think so.

**VASQUEZ:** You think that's the cost of doing business?

**OBLEDO:** Well, apparently it is.

**VASQUEZ:** How do you think that affects a civil rights organization?

**OBLEDO:** Well, it affects it greatly, in a very negative sense. I've always been wishful that we could raise the money from our own community, that the Hispanics underwrite their civil rights organizations. That [way] we wouldn't have to have any allegiance to corporations or foundations or anybody else. We'd really be independent to do things that are in the best interest of our community. But so far, that hasn't come about.

**VASQUEZ:** You took a position at Harvard. I know it was a short tenure as a





professor. But I looked at the pictures of you and your classmates, and I read some of the correspondence of that period. It seems like it had a great impact on you, is that true?

**OBLEDO:** Yes it did.

**VASQUEZ:** In what way?

**OBLEDO:** Well, first you get the feeling, for whatever reason, that if you're at Harvard, you are a superior human being. I mean you mention the word Harvard anywhere, and it opens doors for you. Instead of going to Long Beach State College or Sacramento State, or anything like that. So I felt that I was there, I was one of the first Raza there, and I was able to inspire students. We had a number of Chicanos there, and the number was growing...very bright young people.

**VASQUEZ:** Does anybody come to mind that was there at that time? Hispanics that went on to, to practice law?

**OBLEDO:** Norma Cantú. Who was active at MALDEF, I think she heads the civil rights division in the [U.S.] Department of Education right now. Carlos Alcalá, a lawyer here in Sacramento.

**VASQUEZ:** What did you teach at Harvard?

**OBLEDO:** Introduction to Constitutional Law.

**VASQUEZ:** What did it do for you?

**OBLEDO:** Well it taught me some broader law. I learned a lot when I was



knowing that I had to be in the picture of you and your character.

and I read some of the correspondence of that period. It seems like

it had a great impact on you in that way.

Yes it did.

In what way?

Well, that you got the feeling for which we were there that if you're at

that point, you're a part of that point. I think you mean the

word "character" again here, and it's the word that you looked at

going to Long Beach State College or something like that.

anything like that. But I think I was there. I was one of the first

to see that. And I was with you in that regard. It's not a matter of

character here, and the word is not going to be very highly

regarded.

That's exactly what I mean. That's what I mean. It's not

that word that's a problem here.

Right. I think. Who was there at that time? I think the word is

that right thing is the U.S. Department of Education.

Now, I think I think a little bit more in that way.

What did you mean by that?

Involved in Constitutional Law.

What did I do there?

Well, I think you were there for a long time. I think it was

OSLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

OSLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

OSLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

OSLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

OSLEDO:

there. I learned a lot from the students, who were very bright. I couldn't believe they knew so much. So they made me study as well.

**VASQUEZ:** So it made you, that much sharper, right?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** What was your most memorable experience during your period at Harvard?

**OBLEDO:** At Harvard? Well it had nothing to do with the law really. I got to know the people at the cafeteria, at the lunchroom, and they brought me a big bottle of Tabasco, and I'd sit at the lunchroom and all the professors used to read the *Wall Street Journal*. I would take the dean the *Daily News* or something like that, just to get him disturbed. So that's about all I remember.

**VASQUEZ:** What good did being at Harvard do you?

**OBLEDO:** Well, it gives you a lot of self-confidence for one thing. I think that's the most that can be said for it. If you're there, then you feel that you can conquer the world.

**VASQUEZ:** And it did that for you, even though you weren't a student, as a young professor?

**OBLEDO:** Yes. It did.

**VASQUEZ:** I don't want to get into this today, but I'd like to put on the record. How did you come to the attention of Governor [Edmund] Jerry



I think I learned a lot from the students who were very bright.  
 I think I believe they have to work to stay in the  
 study as well.  
 So it made me, that much more right.  
 Right.  
 What was your most successful experience during your  
 period in Harvard?  
 At Harvard? Well I had gotten to be with the law faculty. I got to  
 know the people in the university, in the law program and the program  
 was a big part of Harvard, and I'd be in the law program and all the  
 professors and all the law faculty. I would take the  
 class the first term or something like that, and in getting  
 involved in that, I was in Harvard.  
 When you did that at Harvard, in your  
 Will, I guess you did that, didn't you? In your thing, I think  
 that's the way that can be said that it was in that, that you had  
 that you can say, the world.  
 And that was the way, even though you were a student in a  
 your program?  
 Yes it is.  
 I think you put into the world, and I'd like to put on the world.  
 I think that's the way in the world of Harvard, I think that's

Brown Jr.?

**OBLEDO:** Well, through some friends of mine. When I was working with MALDEF in California, I established a relationship with some very important lawyers, who were friends of Jerry Brown. So when Jerry Brown was elected they mentioned my name to him, and recommended me for a job, that's how...

**VASQUEZ:** Who were some of these people?

**OBLEDO:** Anthony Kline, who is a judge in San Francisco now, Robert Gnaizda, who works for the Greenling Institute in San Francisco. There were a couple of others.

**VASQUEZ:** So it wasn't necessarily that you were so amazed by or ideologically connected to Jerry Brown...

**OBLEDO:** No I wasn't.

**VASQUEZ:** ...that made him make that choice. What did you think when you got that offer?

**OBLEDO:** Well I didn't know whether to take it or not, because I did like Harvard. I spoke to the dean and the dean told me, "Go ahead and take it, and if you don't like it, come back."

**VASQUEZ:** So you had an open-door policy to come back, right?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** And what was the most daunting part of this job, as you first looked at it?



OSLEDO: Well, things are really of mine. When I was working with  
 MALDIE in Cuba, we established a relationship with some very  
 important people, who were friends of my father. So when they  
 Brown was elected they mentioned my name to him, and  
 recommended me for a job. And a year  
 I was sent to their property.  
 OSLEDO: Anthony King who is a judge in San Francisco Bay. Robert  
 Orosio, who works for the General's Institute in San Francisco.  
 There were a couple of others.  
 VASQUEZ: So it was a recommendation that was given to General Brown.  
 He's pretty connected to Jack Brown.  
 OSLEDO: No, I wasn't.  
 VASQUEZ: That would have made the difference. When did you meet with him  
 for the first time?  
 OSLEDO: Well, I think I know what you mean. I met him like  
 fifteen years ago. He was in the office and he told me, "Go ahead and  
 take it, and if you don't like it, come back."  
 VASQUEZ: So you had an open-door policy to come back, right?  
 OSLEDO: Right.  
 VASQUEZ: And what was the next thing that happened, as you first looked

**OBLEDO:** Well I remember speaking with the Governor and I had looked at the schematic chart of the Health and Welfare Agency. I told the governor, I said, "Governor I've never run an agency like that, it's just so big and has got so many employees and a great big budget, etc." He said, "I've never been Governor before, but I'm going to be," so I took the job.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you like him when you first met him?

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** Right away?

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** What did you like about him?

**OBLEDO:** Well he was young, very idealistic, a liberal, progressive, ...he was very supportive of whatever I did.

**VASQUEZ:** What kind of advice did you get from your colleagues in MALDEF and other organizations, L.U.L.A.C and other organizations you had been in when this offer came?

**OBLEDO:** None really. They were all elated because I was the first Mexican-American, or Hispanic to be appointed to the cabinet in the state...

**VASQUEZ:** Of California.

**OBLEDO:** ...so everybody just went with it, I mean due to having [inaudible], they were elated.

**VASQUEZ:** In California as well?



ORLEDO:

Well I remember speaking with the Governor and I had looked at the estimate - part of the Health and Welfare Agency. I told the Governor I said "Governor I've never seen anything like that. It's just so big and has got so many things and a great big budget. It's the fact I've never seen anything like that but I'm going to be" so I took the job.

VASQUEZ:

Did you like the job when you first started?

ORLEDO:

Yes.

VASQUEZ:

Right away?

ORLEDO:

Yes.

VASQUEZ:

What did you like about that?

ORLEDO:

Well he was young, very intelligent, liberal, progressive. He was very respectful of others. I said:

VASQUEZ:

What kind of advice did you give them your colleagues in ALABAMA?

and other organizations. I said, "I've got some suggestions for you."

ORLEDO:

Those things. They were all closed because I was the first Hispanic American in Alabama to be elected to the cabinet in the state.

VASQUEZ:

Of course.

ORLEDO:

...so every body just went with it. I mean they're in a hurry (immediate).

VASQUEZ:

in California as well.

**OBLEDO:** Yes, they had a lot of receptions for me. They couldn't believe that I had been appointed. So I got a lot of demands from our community because I was Hispanic.

**VASQUEZ:** Did those help you or hinder you?

**OBLEDO:** I tried to help them in any situation that I could.

**VASQUEZ:** But did it help you to have that kind of a base?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes.

**VASQUEZ:** Did it help you do a good job?

**OBLEDO:** Sure.

**VASQUEZ:** Lets get more into detail on that discussion on tomorrow's session.

**OBLEDO:** All right.

**VASQUEZ:** Is that ok?

**OBLEDO:** Ok.



Yes, they had a lot of experience for me. They couldn't believe that

ORLEDO:

I had been a lawyer. So I got a lot of business from the

company because I was different.

Did they help you or hinder you?

VASQUEZ:

I tried to help them in any situation that I could.

ORLEDO:

Did this help you to have that kind of a bank?

VASQUEZ:

Oh yes.

ORLEDO:

Did it help you as a great judge?

VASQUEZ:

Sure.

ORLEDO:

Let's get back to that trial which took place on November 2, 1964.

VASQUEZ:

All right.

ORLEDO:

Is that all?

VASQUEZ:

Oh.

ORLEDO:

[Session 2, July 27, 1999]

[Continue Tape 1, Side B]

**VASQUEZ:** We are recording the second session of an interview with Mario Obledo in Sacramento, California. It's July 27, 1999 and yesterday we went over a period in your life, that shaped a lot of your public image, but also I think, from the comments that you made yesterday, shaped you as well. Before we go on to other topics, and the next topic would be, your appointment to Health Educational Office Secretary of the state of California. There are other organizations that you have been involved with over the years and they intersect with the period we talked about. Maybe you could talk to us a little bit about those organizations. One is the Southwest Intergroup Relations Council [Inc.], which was organized in 1969. Tell me about that organization, if you will. What its purposes were.

**OBLEDO:** That organization no longer exists. At the time the objective was to create better human relations between various ethnic and racial groups in America. So we functioned for about five years, or so. We had a good board, Mervyn Dymally, the former lieutenant governor of California and former congressman from California was a member of it. And so [were] a lot of prominent people.





**VASQUEZ:** Willie [L.] Brown I believe was a member, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** I believe so.

**VASQUEZ:** [Senator] Joe [J.] Bernal?

**OBLEDO:** Joe Bernal.

**VASQUEZ:** Vine Deloria [Jr.]

**OBLEDO:** Right. He's a very noted Indian writer.

**VASQUEZ:** Dr. Ralph Guzman, who's passed away now, but was at [University of California] Santa Cruz at that time.

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** And it was to, "Promote equality of opportunity for our mutual understanding, respect and cooperation among all people and groups of the Southwest." Was this a sort of an advisory group, did you meet to exchange information, or what was purpose?

**OBLEDO:** No, actually it was not an advisory group, it was a policy making group. We used to try to foster better human relations between various groups. As you know, there is stress between the various ethnic groups, between the Hispanic and the Black, the Black and the Jewish community etc., and we were trying to alleviate those problems.

**VASQUEZ:** How long did that function, 5 years you say?

**OBLEDO:** About 5 years.

**VASQUEZ:** It changed its name at one point, right?



VASQUEZ:

Willie [L.] Brown I believe was a member, is that right?

ORLEDO:

I believe so.

VASQUEZ:

[Name] for [L.] Brown?

ORLEDO:

Yes, Brown.

VASQUEZ:

Was Brown [L.]

ORLEDO:

Right. He's very much a [L.] Brown.

VASQUEZ:

The [L.] Brown who's present now, was [L.] Brown?

ORLEDO:

Yes.

VASQUEZ:

And it was [L.] Brown who [L.] Brown, for our mutual

understanding, [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

groups of the [L.] Brown? Was [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

you [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

ORLEDO:

Yes, actually it was [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

groups. We [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

various groups. As [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

these groups [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

the [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

problem.

VASQUEZ:

How long [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

ORLEDO:

About 2 years.

VASQUEZ:

It [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown [L.] Brown

**OBLEDO:** Well I think it did, but I don't recall, now.

**VASQUEZ:** There's another group that you got involved with, I don't know if it was around this time or a little later, and that was the Southwest Voter Registration Project.

**OBLEDO:** Well that was 1974. When I went back to San Antonio from San Francisco, Willie Velasquez was then the executive director of Southwest Voter, came to try to get a tax-exempt number for the organization. But they had been through a lot trying to get that number. So he brought me the material. It was a stack about three feet high and I was not inclined to go through it. So we decided to change the name of the organization. He filed an application for a tax-exempt number, and we drove that application from San Antonio to Austin to the IRS headquarters. The following day we got a letter rejecting us. So then we appealed it to Washington D.C., and I spoke to the lawyer in Washington D.C., compared the Southwest Voter Registration Project to the voter project in Atlanta, Georgia. So they're identical and yet the Voter Project was tax exempt. So they gave us a letter of tax exemption for the Southwest Voter [Registration] Project. And that's how we got started.

**VASQUEZ:** Willie Velasquez, was he one of the people that came out of one of the first [groups of] interns in, the early MALDEF years?

**OBLEDO:** Yes he was. He worked for MALDEF for a while.



OSLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

OSLEDO:

VASQUEZ:

OSLEDO:

**VASQUEZ:** Did you maintain contact with that organization, in the later years?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes I did. Up to this day I still have contact with it. I served on the Board of Directors for some time, but I still communicate with them quite frequently.

**VASQUEZ:** What do you think is the significance, or has been the significance, of that organization?

**OBLEDO:** Well, when Southwest Voter Project was founded, I told Willie Velasquez that in my mind [it] was the most important organization in our community, because it was meant to empower people, to get [out] the Hispanic to vote, and to increase our numbers at the voting polls. That has come about slowly; there's been a tremendous change in the Southwest, in California, in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Hispanics are voting, they're becoming recognized now, we're getting more powerful, and we have in California the Lieutenant Governor who's a Mexican-American [Cruz Bustamante]. So that says a lot, I mean who would ever dream that in this century we'd have a [lieutenant] governor in the State of California for instance.

**VASQUEZ:** In addition to a lieutenant governor you also have a Speaker of the Assembly [Antonio Villaraigosa].

**OBLEDO:** A Speaker of the Assembly.

**VASQUEZ:** A lot of powerful people in the Senate as well.





**OBLEDO:** Right. So we've come a long way, but we still have some way to go yet. So the Southwest Voter Registration Project is still working very hard to try to register people to vote and to try to get them to the voting places on the day of elections.

**VASQUEZ:** So [Assembly Speaker] Jess Unruh's [famous] comment that, "Chicanos don't count cause they don't vote." Do you think those days are over?

**OBLEDO:** Those days are over.

**VASQUEZ:** There was another organization that you were involved with, or that you were the co-founder of, and that's the Hispanic National Bar Association. What year did that take place and what was your role in it?

**OBLEDO:** That was in, about 1972, if I recall correctly. A gentleman came to MALDEF proposing that a Mexican-American organization be part of the CLEO Program. But in order to do that we needed a bar association and we didn't have one. So Luís García, Cruz Reynoso, and I founded the La Raza Lawyers Association in San Francisco, around 1972. And we got a tax-exempt number for the organization and became a member of the board of the CLEO organization. CLEO being a federal program, designated to assist attorneys, young attorneys through school and then internships, etc. Later on the name was changed from La Raza Lawyers Association to the



CHILDO:

Right. So we were a long way, but we still have some way to go.  
Yes. So the National Health Insurance Project is still working.  
Very hard to try to register people to vote and to try to get them to  
the voting place on the day of election.

VASQUEZ:

So [Assembly Speaker] Jose [Luis] [Martínez] continues that.  
"The more that I read about this, the more I like it. Do you think there  
is any one else?"

CHILDO:

There are many, my friend.  
There was another organization that was merged with us that  
was very close to the National Health Insurance Project.  
A similar one. When I saw that they were close and when we were  
in it.

CHILDO:

That was in about 1971. It was very close. A person was going to  
MEXICO to organize that. I think it was a very good organization for the  
of the CLIO Project. But in 1972, we decided to do  
association and we then, however, the first CLIO Project  
and I founded the first CLIO Project in 1972.  
around 1972, and we got a very strong leader for the organization  
and became a member of the board of the CLIO organization.  
CLIO was a federal program, designed to help the  
young women, the young men, and then through the CLIO  
the same way through the CLIO Project. I think I would like to mention to the

National Hispanic Bar Association. They have an office in Washington D.C. today, are very active, they hold a convention every year, it's a very sophisticated event, they have judges and, prominent lawyers come to speak to the association, so it's become quite an institution.

**VASQUEZ:** Inaudible [tape garbled]

**OBLEDO:** Inaudible [tape garbled]

[End Tape 1, Side B]



National Hispanic Bar Association. They have an office in  
Washington D.C. today, the way we've been doing it for many years,  
every year, it's a very significant event. They have judges and  
prosecutors, lawyers come to speak to the association, so it's a big deal.

date to tomorrow

VASQUEZ: (handing him folder)

ORLEDO: (handing him folder)

(End Tape 1 Side B)

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

**VASQUEZ:** And its contribution has been what, to expand...?

**OBLEDO:** Its contribution has been to educate Hispanic Lawyers, to get them involved in bar activities, to try to give them more opportunity in the legal profession.

**VASQUEZ:** Let me ask you a question that maybe out of sequence, but it may be timely to ask it now, I remember during the Carter administration and I was looking through your record in your papers. You, among other people, very assertively were saying "President Carter, its time to have a Hispanic on the Supreme Court," and yet that hasn't taken place. Why do you think that is?

**OBLEDO:** Well it's been a lack of political power yet. But we are organizing and the National Hispanic Bar Association has been in communication with the [President William J.] Clinton Administration, to appoint a Hispanic as the next Supreme Court justice. Eventually we will get one I'm sure. It's just a matter of time.

**VASQUEZ:** Does it make sense to you that [organizations] like the Hispanic National Bar Association would be one of the "point" organizations in bringing that about?

**OBLEDO:** That's right, they are lobbying for it now.

**VASQUEZ:** Do you suppose the National Council of La Raza would also be involved in something like that?

**OBLEDO:** Well I would hope so. Because the Council of the La Raza is a very prominent advocacy group and I think they would have a lot of influence on the appointment of a judge to the Supreme Court.



VASQUEZ: And the committee has been able to report...

OSLEDO: In connection with the... I want to get this involved in the...

VASQUEZ: Let me ask you a question that might not be a question, but it may be timely to ask...

OSLEDO: Well it's been a lack of political power, but we are organizing and the...

VASQUEZ: Does it make sense to you that... I want to get this involved in the...

OSLEDO: That's right, the... I want to get this involved in the...

VASQUEZ: Do you support the... I want to get this involved in the...

OSLEDO: Well I would like to... I want to get this involved in the...

**VASQUEZ:** Let's get back to the mid '70s. Because these overlap, I want to get you to comment on some of these organizations. But let's get back to the mid '70s. You left MALDEF, [you'd] gone to Harvard and, I guess, you taught there for what – eight months?

**OBLEDO:** About eight months.

**VASQUEZ:** And then your name was brought to the attention of newly elected [California] Governor Brown by Anthony Klein and people like that. And you were appointed Health & Welfare Secretary in 1975 right? Tell me what was the atmosphere was. If I may set a little bit of a context: its post-Watergate. Watergate has not been too long in [happening]; things in Vietnam are clearly not going well for the United States and in May of 1975, we see our ambassador leaving the U.S. embassy in Saigon – on a helicopter – off the roof [of the Embassy]. There is a movement here in California that people have identified, not so much as a tax reform movement, but an anti-politician movement, called Proposition 13, which is to affect the tax base that's available for social programs. It is a context in which you come into this position with a budget that, eventually by the time you leave, reaches 15 billion dollars. Probably the largest agency, it is the largest agency in state government.

**OBLEDO:** Yes it is.

**VASQUEZ:** It has a larger budget [than] most states in the United States and many other countries in the world.

**OBLEDO:** That's right.



VASQUEZ: Let's get back to the end. The 1980s were a decade of change. I want to get you to

comment on some of those changes. But let's get back to the end. The 1980s

Let MALDER: You'll go to the end and I want you to go to the end.

right number

ORLEDO: About eight months

VASQUEZ: And then your name was brought to the attention of newly elected officials

Question: How is it? What kind of people like this? And you were appointed

Heidi A. Walker: Secretary in 1985. Tell me what was the atmosphere was

It's not a little bit of a change. It was a change. It was a change. It was a change.

long in [happening] things. Vietnam was clearly not going well for the United

States and in May of 1975, Vietnam was clearly not going well for the United

States - on a photograph - off the coast of the United States. This is a photograph

here in California. The people here are not as much as a few years

movement but we had a political movement called Proposition 13 which is to

affect the tax base that's available for social programs. It's a movement in which you

come into this position with a budget that eventually by the time you leave

there is a huge deficit. Looking at the largest deficit, it is the largest deficit in

the government.

ORLEDO: Yes it is.

VASQUEZ: It was a huge deficit. I think you were in the United States and many other

countries in the world.

ORLEDO: That's right.

**VASQUEZ:** You are the first Latino or Hispanic to come into the Cabinet of the California Executive, at least in this century. Tell me what the context was, from your point of view.

**OBLEDO:** Well you have described the situation correctly. All those events were occurring. But it really had no impact on state government, except for Proposition 13, which cut the tax base for state government. But Governor Jerry Brown was a progressive; he was a liberal, he believed in social programs, so that our budget was never cut in the Health and Welfare Agency. In fact, it was supplemented and he supported all the activities I was involved in promoting equality of opportunity, an increase in social programs for the elderly and for the children for the state of California. So, it was a very heavy, if you will, time in my life when I was doing a lot of things that I had always wanted to do and I felt government had a role in those kind of activities.

**VASQUEZ:** [Did] you, at that point, consider yourself a New Deal liberal?

**OBLEDO:** Yes I did. I have been an admirer of [President] Franklin [D.] Roosevelt all of my life.

**VASQUEZ:** So it makes sense that you [would] think government's role was to help people to be involved....

**OBLEDO:** That's correct, to solve problems for people.

**VASQUEZ:** And of course the tenor of the times was going the other way. It was going more to the Right. For example, the prison policy was moving away from reform, to punishment.



YASQUEZ: You are the first I know of Hispanic to write me for a chance of the California  
Executive, is that in the country. Tell me what the content was from your point  
of view.

DELBO: Well you have described the situation correctly. All these events were occurring  
But I really had no impact on this government except for Proposition 13 which  
cut the tax base. That was the government. But I was not in the House with a  
progressive. He was a liberal, he believed in social programs, so that our budget  
was never cut in the House and I believe a very big role. It was implemented and  
he supported all the initiatives I was involved in planning, mainly, the  
opportunity to have a social program for the elderly and for the children for  
the state of California. So it was a very heavy role. I was in my life when I  
was doing a lot of things. But I had always wanted to do and I felt government had  
a role in these kind of activities.

YASQUEZ: (Did you at that point, couldn't you get a new Post House?)  
DELBO: Yes I did. I had a house in a house in (Berkeley) Berkeley. It was the best of my  
life.

YASQUEZ: So it makes sense that you (would) that government in a role was to help people to  
be involved...

DELBO: That's correct, to help people for people.

YASQUEZ: And of course the state of the house was going the other way. It was going from  
to the right for example, the house which was moving away from liberalism to  
conservatism.

**OBLEDO:** But I had the prisons under my jurisdiction and I lowered the inmate population from about, I can't really recall the exact figures, but I think there were about thirty five thousand inmates in the prisons and I brought it down to about ten thousand. The correction officers got very concerned about that, because of their jobs. So they brought pressure on the legislature, and the prisons were taken away from me, and a different agency was created for the prisons. But I thought we were doing very [well] in that regard.

**VASQUEZ:** At one point, there was a two-year period in which the percentage of the minority population in prisons went from forty eight percent to fifty four percent and you made some very poignant statements about that. Do you think that contributed to the prisons being taken away from your jurisdiction?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, I was a little controversial about that. So there was pressure brought on the legislature to take the prisons away from me, particularly, by the correctional officers association. They were leery that the populations was going to dwindle down to almost nothing, and that they would be out of work. So that is what happened.

**VASQUEZ:** Wasn't it also the case that some politicians would be out of work if they didn't have prisoners and criminals to rail against?

**OBLEDO:** Probably so. There were some legislators involved in that movement.

**VASQUEZ:** Was George Deukmejian involved in that?

**OBLEDO:** I don't recall.

**VASQUEZ:** He was the Attorney General then, I think.

**OBLEDO:** Right.



OSLEDO: But I had the papers under my pillow and I turned the papers upside down about I can't really recall the year, I think it was about thirty five thousand papers in the papers and I thought it down to about ten thousand. The contents of the papers were very good about that, papers of that sort for the papers, papers for the papers, and the papers were very good from me, and a different agency was created for the papers. But I thought we were doing very good in the papers.

VASQUEZ: At the point, there was a two year period in which the papers were of the nature population is given with their right papers in that time period and then more were very good, especially those that I can't find the names of, the papers being taken away from me in addition.

OSLEDO: Oh yes, I was a little surprised about that. So that was another thing on the papers to take the papers away from me, papers by the newspapers, officers responsible. They were papers, the population was going to be taken down to about nothing, and that they would be out of work. So that is what happened.

VASQUEZ: When I take the papers, the papers would be out of work if they didn't have papers and naturally we all agreed.

OSLEDO: Probably not. There were some papers, papers in the newspaper.

VASQUEZ: Was George Eastman involved in this?

OSLEDO: I don't recall.

VASQUEZ: It was in Albany, I think that I think.

OSLEDO: Right.

**VASQUEZ:** Before we go on to other things, since we are on this topic. One of the main criticisms leveled against you was that you were "soft on crime" and as a result of an article in the *Readers Digest*, it was intimated that you might be connected to the Mexican Mafia, or other criminal gangs in the state of California. Talk to me about that.

**OBLEDO:** Well that's a long story. Actually there was no truth to the article. But what happened was that my office used to clear some grants to community organizations, quite a number of grants in fact. I didn't directly see them or pass over them. Some of my staff people did. And that person had approved a grant to a community organization in Los Angeles that was later found out to be controlled by the Mexican Mafia. And that was the connection.

**VASQUEZ:** [Inaudible]

**OBLEDO:** Yes I think so, that was the connection. They tied me in and they said, "You should look over every grant," but it was impossible for me to do that because there was a large number of them. And I had so many other duties to perform. But that is what happened in that case.

**VASQUEZ:** And then you were even brought in to court, subpoenaed to court, when Michael Delia was accused of killing his wife, who was willing to testify that there was a lot of gang activities involved in some of the agencies.

**OBLEDO:** The story was that she came to Sacramento to see me to tell me about the story. And it was on her way to my office that she was picked up and murdered. So that was the connection there. But I never met Delia, if that was his name.

**VASQUEZ:** You never met him?





**OBLEDO:** I never met him or spoke to him. I never knew him.

**VASQUEZ:** So you think it was mostly a fabricated charge?

**OBLEDO:** Well it all happened around the same time of the lowering of the population in the prisons, the community grant of Los Angeles, the murder of this lady who was supposedly had information on the Mafia control in a lot of the institutions. That's when all the events came together, so to speak.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you visit the prisons?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, quite frequently. I went to all the prisons.

**VASQUEZ:** What was your assessment of conditions [in] the prisons?

**OBLEDO:** Well I found them to be adequately staffed and I found the food to be rather good.

**OBLEDO:** I found the conditions to be rather safe for the prisoners.

**VASQUEZ:** You [got] a lot of requests for assistance from different high-profile prisoners like Hugo Pineda, for instance...

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** And you [took] it upon yourself to try to do something to alleviate their situation.

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** You didn't see that as a conflict with the position that you held?

**OBLEDO:** Not really. No, because I felt that it was my duty to try to help human beings in the best way I could. And I always looked at him as a human being.

**VASQUEZ:** So it goes back to your early attitude, when you were in MALDEF, you helped everybody, irrespective. There was another incident, or another scandal, that people made a lot of in the *California Journal*, and other publications of the day.



OSLEDO: I never met him or spoke to him. I never knew him.

VASQUEZ: So you think it was really a friendly change?

OSLEDO: Well it all happened around the same time as the founding of the population in the prison, the entrance of the Angel, the murder of the last who was supposedly had information on the state control for a lot of the population. That's when all the events came together, so to speak.

VASQUEZ: Did you visit the prison?

OSLEDO: Oh yes quite frequently. I went to all the prisons.

VASQUEZ: What was your impression of conditions [in the prison]?

OSLEDO: Well I found them to be extremely difficult and I found the food to be rather good. I found the conditions to be better than the other prisons.

VASQUEZ: You [you] a lot of reports of resistance that different high profile prisoners like Hugo Bonilla, for instance.

OSLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: And you [you] it again yourself is it to do something or otherwise that situation?

OSLEDO: Right.

VASQUEZ: You don't see that as a conflict with the position that you held?

OSLEDO: No, because I felt that it was my duty to try to help because I was in the best way I could. And I always looked at this as a human being.

VASQUEZ: So it goes back to your early work, when you were in MALI, you helped everybody, everybody, because I was not a leader or was not enough, that people were a lot of in the Christian Church, and other institutions of the day.

That had to do with the firing of Dr. Josette Mondanaro, who was in charge of the rehabilitation programs. Would you talk to me about that?

**OBLEDO:** Actually Governor Brown made the decision to discharge her. I didn't know her. I didn't know of her work, or anything else. But she was labeled as a "lesbian," if I recall correctly. And so the lesbian community made a big deal out of it. The firing of Dr. Mondanaro, is that her name?

**VASQUEZ:** So it was just peripheral to your activities, it was more against Governor Brown?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** While you were Secretary of Health and Welfare it is noticeable, when one reads the record that you were out in the Hispanic community a lot.

**OBLEDO:** I was.

**VASQUEZ:** You spoke at hundreds of dinners, Cinco de Mayos, and community councils. Why?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I wanted the people to recognize that we were in government, that they had a stake in it, that they had access to government and they ought to take advantage of the situation, to improve the quality of life for themselves and others.

**VASQUEZ:** You even got involved in comments and positions on a topic that probably was not politically wise, at the time. Probably the one that most comes to mind is your position on immigration policy. Did that cause you some political leverage?

**OBLEDO:** No, surprisingly it did not. I made a speech one time calling for an open border and converting the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] to a reception agency to welcome the immigrants and to direct them to places where jobs were



That had to do with the flight of the tobacco industry, who was in charge of

the rehabilitation program. Would you talk to me about that?

OSBORN: Actually, I think I know the answer to that. I know that I

didn't know of her work, or anything else. But she was listed as a "victim". It's

recall correct. And so the justice community made a big deal out of it. The

thing of Mr. Malabar, is that her name?

VASQUEZ: So it was just pointed to your attention. It was more against Governor Brown.

OSBORN: Right.

VASQUEZ: While you were Secretary of Health and Welfare, it is possible, when one reads

the record that you were in the Hispanic community a lot.

OSBORN: I was.

VASQUEZ: You spoke in Spanish at various times, didn't you, and community

events. Why?

OSBORN: Well, I wanted the people to know that we were in the community, that they had

a stake in it. This city had a great many people who were right in the middle

of the situation, so I wanted the quality of the city improved and others

VASQUEZ: You even got involved in community and political as a representative of

not politically what, at the time. Probably, the one that came to mind is you

position on international affairs. This was a very important political position.

OSBORN: No, surprisingly, I did not make a speech on international law or justice

and convincing the 1980 legislation and legislation devoted to a campaign

agency to support the legislation and to have them to place them in

available and schools were available and to regulate activities. But I thought I would get a lot of flak for that speech, but I didn't. So that was surprising.

**VASQUEZ:** Let me get into that then. Expand on that. I was going to save this discussion for later when we talk about international relations and the international activities you were involved in. But since we're there now, what's your thinking, what is the logic between having and not having an open border with Mexico?

**OBLEDO:** Well I think that we ought to have an open border, not only in capital goods and services but in human beings. I think they add a lot to our economy. After all, most immigrants live in Texas and California and those are the two most productive states in the United States. So they must add to our economy, it only stands to reason. We have a lot of land here. We have a lot of jobs here that people who live here don't perform, so we could always use that labor in human capital. And I think that since Mexico is so close to us, we should import the people this United States, let them work here for a period of time, and then they can go back home if they desire.

**VASQUEZ:** Would you be adverse to, or be supportive of, a dual citizenship for Mexican citizens.

**OBLEDO:** I believe in the dual citizenship. I think that is the case now. Where people can be both Mexicans and Americans at the same time.

**VASQUEZ:** What would you say to those who say that no other country in the world has an open border? That [it] would cause nightmarish security problems for the United States.



available and schools were terrible and so on. But I thought I would get a lot of the the people I believe I do that was something.

VASQUEZ: Let me put you that that I am not sure of this discussion for how when we talk about the national role, and the international situation you were involved in that about the situation, what's your thinking about the logic between having and not having an open market with Mexico?

GALEDO: Well I think that we ought to have an open market, not only in capital goods and services but in human beings. I think that with a lot of money. After all, most immigrants here in Texas and California and across the two most productive countries in the world. So they want to be in our economy, they want to come. I have a lot of hard work. We have a lot of jobs here that people who live here don't produce. So we could improve our life here in human capital. And I think the same situation is so close to us, we should report the people this situation. But we want to have the system of that, and then they can go back home if they desire.

VASQUEZ: Would you be adverse to the possibility of a dual citizenship for Mexican citizens?

GALEDO: I believe in the dual citizenship situation. I believe that people can be both Mexicans and Americans at the same time.

VASQUEZ: What would you say to those who say that an open economy in the world has an open border? That is, would you agree with the idea of having an open border?

GALEDO: I think that's a very good question. I think that's a very good question.

**OBLEDO:** Well I don't think so, I think that the program of an open border can be regulated to the extent that it is a workable situation for both countries, and both countries would really benefit from it.

**VASQUEZ:** We will come back to U.S.-Mexico relations. What do you think was your greatest accomplishment as Health and Welfare secretary? You were there seven years?

**OBLEDO:** I was there seven years [Vásquez talks (inaudible)] Right. I think my greatest accomplishment was bringing Hispanics and other people of color into state government to work. I'm very proud of that. And I think that is my legacy to state government. Because I was able to bring in hundreds of people into state government with good jobs, etc. that were in policy-making positions, that had a lot of impact on our community.

**VASQUEZ:** Let me ask you a more intimate question now, and that has to do with your relationship with the governor. A number of times you threatened to resign, more than once. And said that you would resign unless the governor asked you to stay. Was that a tactic, or was that something that [indicated] a conflict between the two of you?

**OBLEDO:** No. At the time there [were] a couple of situations where I felt that I had to leave. But the governor was very supportive and urged me to stay. He was very supportive of my ideas, my philosophy, etc. He never got after me for anything I ever did in state government. So I felt an obligation to stay and help, as long as I could.



OSLEDO: Well I don't think it is a question of whether or not it can be negotiated.

to the extent that it is a question of whether or not it can be negotiated.

would really be a

VASQUEZ: We will come back to it. I don't know. What do you think was

question of negotiation on the part of the government? I don't know.

years.

OSLEDO: I was there seven years. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

negotiations were being held. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

government is not. I am very proud of that. And I don't know. I don't know.

government. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

government with good jobs. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

lot of things in the country.

VASQUEZ: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

relationship with the government. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

Was that a mistake? I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

two of you.

OSLEDO: No. As the first time. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

But the government was very important. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

importance of my ideas. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

over the last few years. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

could.

**VASQUEZ:** There were a couple of times when there [were] testimonials dinners at which a thousand, two thousand, Hispanics showed up...

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** ... and the governor attended these events...

**OBLEDO:** That's right.

**VASQUEZ:** ...because of your support for him, or for his [own] political ambitions?

**OBLEDO:** No, he was very supportive. He attended those events, they were very moving events, in fact, a lot of people were supporting me, and I was extremely glad [for] that support.

**VASQUEZ:** Let me ask you something that may be an impressionistic kind of question, but at the time, I remember liberals being frustrated with Governor Brown. Because Governor Brown came into office as a fiscal conservative, someone that was going to, in fact he used the term, "compassion fatigue" and he was going to toughen up on things. Did you ever have conflicts with that?

**OBLEDO:** No I didn't. He used to say that, "less was more," for instance. So he was a fiscal conservative, but he never cut the budget of Health and Welfare. He was a very social liberal, so-to-speak, very progressive.

**VASQUEZ:** What is your opinion about his track record in bringing minorities, not only into state government, but also into the judicial branch of government?

**OBLEDO:** Well, it was a record that I would've been proud of. He never objected to the fact that I used to bring him; I mean hundreds of people, into state government, minorities etc. In fact I had thirteen departments under my authority, and when I





left government, ten of those departments had reached parity, population parity.

So I was extremely proud of that.

**VASQUEZ:** How about current administrations in the government. Is that there now?

**OBLEDO:** I think so. I don't think that [an equivalent number] has ever been reached.

**VASQUEZ:** What was your sentiment towards Governor Brown's aspirations to be president?

**OBLEDO:** Well, actually I was very supportive; I thought he'd make a great president, because he is a great idea man. He has a lot of ideas, he's a visionary. So I was very supportive of him. I'm sorry that he didn't win.

**VASQUEZ:** It's been said about Governor Brown that there is a disconnect between the ideas that he has and the people that he brings in to implement [them]. Is that fair?

**OBLEDO:** I don't think that's fair. Actually there is a little truth to that statement because he had so many ideas, and a lot of them never got implemented. But some of them did, and I think he has had his mind on the future.

**VASQUEZ:** Was he, in your mind, the ideal combination of visionary and implementer? Or activist?

**OBLEDO:** Yes he was, he still is to this day.

**VASQUEZ:** Now he is the mayor of Oakland.

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** And do you see [that step] as consistent with his approach to politics?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, I think he is in a position where he can help people, and Oakland certainly needs a lot of help. So I think he's in the right position at the right time.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you know his father? [Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr.]

**OBLEDO:** I met his father on two or three occasions.





**VASQUEZ:** But you didn't know him well.

**OBLEDO:** I didn't know him well. No.

**VASQUEZ:** But you knew his reputation.

**OBLEDO:** Oh very much so. I think he is the greatest governor the State ever had, really.

**VASQUEZ:** Governor Edmund Brown.

**OBLEDO:** Governor Brown Sr.

**VASQUEZ:** But is there a disconnect, as much of a disconnect, between the governor and his son as people say?

**OBLEDO:** No, I don't think so. I think his son takes after his dad. His dad did a lot for California in the way of freeways, education, and the University system. So many other things that he did for the state of California.

**VASQUEZ:** So you lasted seven years [on Governor Brown's Cabinet].

**OBLEDO:** I did.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you ever have conflicts with other members of the administration?

**OBLEDO:** No, not really. We all got along fairly well.

**VASQUEZ:** In both administrations?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, both times.

**VASQUEZ:** Did support wane in the second administration, for the governor, or for your activities?

**OBLEDO:** Oh no, it continued full blast until I left.

**VASQUEZ:** Lets move on to something that is of great interest to a lot of people, and that is your 1982 run for Governor, in the Democratic primary.

**OBLEDO:** Yes.



VASQUEZ: But you don't know him well.

ORLEDO: I don't know him well, no.

VASQUEZ: But you know his reputation.

ORLEDO: Oh very much so. I think he is the greatest person in the State and really

VASQUEZ: Governor Johnson Brown.

ORLEDO: Governor Brown is.

VASQUEZ: But is there a difference as much of a difference between the Governor and his

son as people say?

ORLEDO: No, I don't think so. I think he is an able administrator and his son is just

California in the way of business, education and the University system. So many

things that he is the son of California.

VASQUEZ: So you think you know him (Governor Brown's Character).

ORLEDO: I do.

VASQUEZ: Did you ever have anything with other members of the administration?

ORLEDO: No, not really. We all get along just fine.

VASQUEZ: Is that all?

ORLEDO: Yes, that's all.

VASQUEZ: Did you ever have any kind of a quarrel with the Governor or his son?

ORLEDO: No.

ORLEDO: Oh, no. I wouldn't quarrel with him.

VASQUEZ: Let me see if I can get you to say a few words to a lot of people and that is

just it; not for Governor or the Governor's family.

ORLEDO: Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** You entered the primary kind of late [didn't] you.

**OBLEDO:** No, I think I entered it in February.

**VASQUEZ:** In February, of '82?

**OBLEDO:** '82, right.

**VASQUEZ:** But [State Controller] Ken Cory and [State Senator] John Garamendi, and people like that had been running since '81.

**OBLEDO:** And [Mayor Tom] Bradley, yes for a long time.

**VASQUEZ:** What made you think that you, and you had a very confident posture at that time that you could win the primary?

**OBLEDO:** Well, for one thing I was well known. For a second, the Hispanic community was registering to vote in large numbers. I thought perhaps that if we could unify our own community, that I would have a good chance at it. It takes about a million votes to win the primary, and we had 1.2 million registered voters. So I thought that was a possibility of getting that vote in the bloc and then trying to [siphon away] some votes from the Anglo community, and the Black community.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you think that you had the capability to raise the necessary amount of money?

**OBLEDO:** Well I thought initially that I did, but it turned out that I didn't.

**VASQUEZ:** You raised what, a million dollars?

**OBLEDO:** Over a million dollars.

**VASQUEZ:** And some of the other people were raising five, six million?

**OBLEDO:** Five, six million...right.

**VASQUEZ:** Was that a factor?

**OBLEDO:** Oh certainly, it takes a lot of money to win an election.





**VASQUEZ:** In what part of the state did you do the best?

**OBLEDO:** Down south, in Los Angeles and those areas out there.

Where there [are] more Hispanics.

**VASQUEZ:** You do well in some of the Northern districts... (inaudible) with large Hispanic populations...(inaudible)

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** Were these all places that you had visited or spoken to...

**OBLEDO:** Where people knew me, and my track record.

**VASQUEZ:** Some people, at the time, criticized you saying that you might have been responsible for the fact that Tom Bradley didn't win the [general] election.

**OBLEDO:** Well he won; Tom Bradley won the primary and lost the general election by a hundred thousand votes or so. So he came really close, and I think that his primary problem was that he was a Black and [George] Deukmejian capitalized on that. So I think that was a deciding factor in the election.

**VASQUEZ:** Were all of your former advisors, and friends, all in agreement that you should run?

**OBLEDO:** Well all the ones that I had recruited did. Maybe I just recruited people that I knew would urge me to vote, run.

**VASQUEZ:** (inaudible)

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** But you had no old-time advisors or friends that told you, "Mario, maybe you shouldn't do it, it's not the time?"

**OBLEDO:** Not that I recall, No.





**VASQUEZ:** You got a lot of press nationally.

**OBLEDO:** Yes.

**VASQUEZ:** As the result of it, (inaudible, Obledo remarks and interrupts audio)

**OBLEDO:** I hesitated to run because Bradley was in the race. And Bradley is Black, and

**VASQUEZ:** everyone considered him Black. Although he was not considered Black in many

**OBLEDO:** Black areas, and he still ran. He ran a good race. He'd been mayor of L.A. for a

**VASQUEZ:** number of years. He was well known, he was very articulate, and he won the

**OBLEDO:** primary.

**VASQUEZ:** But he wasn't well known outside of Los Angeles.

**OBLEDO:** Well he was well known in San Francisco and other areas. He had been there and

**OBLEDO:** traveled the state.

**VASQUEZ:** What do you think was the legacy of that race?

**OBLEDO:** Well I think it probably encouraged other people to run for public office. It gave

**OBLEDO:** them the thought that maybe they could win, that they could make a contribution.

So I think I may have motivated people to run for public office.

**VASQUEZ:** After you lost the primary, what did you do then?

**OBLEDO:** I joined the Bradley camp, in his campaign for the governorship. I worked closely

**VASQUEZ:** with him.

**VASQUEZ:** What were your duties then?

**OBLEDO:** Oh, I just was making phone calls to people, asking my supporters to support

Bradley, etc.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you think that you encouraged enough supporters to do that?

**OBLEDO:** I think so.





**VASQUEZ:** What else did you do after that?

**OBLEDO:** Then, I joined the law firm here in Sacramento.

**VASQUEZ:** I'm sorry I didn't hear you.

**OBLEDO:** Alcalá and Cabral Law Firm, and I stayed there for about a year.

**VASQUEZ:** And what did you practice?

**OBLEDO:** Just general practice of law.

**VASQUEZ:** And then after that year?

**OBLEDO:** After that year, I came out and practiced solo. I left the firm and opened my office here, and I have been here ever since. At this location.

**VASQUEZ:** In this location?

**OBLEDO:** 928 Second Street, in Old Sacramento.

**VASQUEZ:** When did you decide to get back into public life by running for LULAC president?

**OBLEDO:** It was 1985, '83 really. I served from 1983 through 1985 during those years. Then I became the chairman of the board at the National Rainbow Coalition.

**VASQUEZ:** Lets get back to the to LULAC.

**OBLEDO:** All right.

**VASQUEZ:** When one goes to the University of the Pacific archives, and when one looks at Arnold Torres' papers, there is a comment that's made about your succeeding Tony Bonilla when Bonilla was president. Let me read to you a little bit of what it says, "When Bonilla stepped out as National president in 1984, he was replaced by the more conservative Mario Obledo. At this time conservatives within LULAC, then calling for Torres' ouster said that with the newly elected ultra-



VASQUEZ: What did you do then?

OSLEDO: Then I joined the law firm in Sacramento.

VASQUEZ: I'm sorry I didn't see you.

OSLEDO: Atlanta and Central Law Firm and I stayed there for about a year.

VASQUEZ: And when did you graduate?

OSLEDO: Just general practice, I saw.

VASQUEZ: And then after that year?

OSLEDO: After that year I came into and graduated. I left the firm and opened my office

here, and I have been here ever since. I didn't know.

VASQUEZ: Is this location?

OSLEDO: 928 Second Street in San Francisco.

VASQUEZ: When did you decide to get back into politics by running for LULAC?

President?

OSLEDO: It was 1981, '82 and I was from 1983 through 1985 during those years. That

I became the chairman of the board in the National Hispanic Council.

VASQUEZ: I am not sure as to the LULAC.

OSLEDO: All right.

VASQUEZ: When one goes to the University of the Pacific, Stanford and wherever else in

Arnold Turner, please state in a comment that I made about your organization.

Tony Herrera when he called me president I was not in a hurry to get out of what I

said. When Herrera passed on as National president in 1984, he was replaced

by the most conservative Hispanic leader in the San Francisco area.

LULAC was calling for Turner, who was with the newly elected office.

conservative Reagan's administration, an aggressive Liberal would render an ineffective spokesman for Hispanics." How do you respond to that characterization of you being a more [conservative candidate]? Once you were considered more liberal, now more conservative than Tony Bonilla?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I find that not to be a truthful statement because I think that I am as liberal as Tony Bonilla was. My record proved it. So I do not know where they got this business of being conservative, unless the fact that I'm quiet, reserved, don't make a lot of noise [about] my activities. But other than that....

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me about your tenure as LULAC president. What were the main issues of the day, and what you think was your greatest endeavor?

**OBLEDO:** Well it's always been the same problems: in the field of education and health, and employment etc., things that we were already trying to do. But I tried to expand the organization into the international arena by visiting Cuba, Nicaragua, Central America, South America, etc. I was trying to get the Latin American people from the Western Hemisphere to work together.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you catch a lot of flak for that?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, I did.

**VASQUEZ:** Even in LULAC?

**OBLEDO:** Even within LULAC. People didn't feel I ought to be traveling abroad to expand the ideas of LULAC, and I obviously disagreed with that.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you ever know Dr. Ernesto Galarza?

**OBLEDO:** I met him once, but I really didn't know him,

**VASQUEZ:** You didn't know what his activities were during the Bracero Program?



conservative Reagan administration, an aggressive I think would be better in

indefinite suspension for the time being. How do you respond to that

characterization of you being a more liberal than we are? I think you were

considered more liberal than we are, conservative than Tony Danza.

ORLEDO: Well, I don't think it is a valid criticism because I think that I am as liberal

as Tony Danza was. My record proved it. So I do not know where that got him

business of being conservative, unless the fact that I'm quite liberal, that I

make a lot of noise about my liberalism, that's all that is.

VASQUEZ: Tell me about your views on the U.S. position. What were the main issues of the

day and what was the role of the United States?

ORLEDO: Well, it's always been the same position in the field of education and health, and

employment etc. things that we were always trying to do. But I think we expand

the organization into the international arena by visiting Cuba, Nicaragua, Central

America, South America, and I was trying to get the Latin American people to

the Western Hemisphere with regard to

VASQUEZ: Did you ever go to the U.S. for that?

ORLEDO: Oh yes, I did.

VASQUEZ: Even in 1982?

ORLEDO: Even while I was in the U.S. I went to the meeting about Nicaragua

the issue of U.S.A. and I obviously disagreed with that

VASQUEZ: Did you ever know Dr. Ernesto Guevara?

ORLEDO: I met him once, but I really don't know him.

VASQUEZ: You didn't know what his attitude was during the Cuban Revolution?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, to some extent I am familiar with it.

**VASQUEZ:** Did that inspire you at all, did that shape any of your activities?

**OBLEDO:** No, not really.

**VASQUEZ:** One more time, tell me what you think you accomplished. Lets pick it up when you started getting involved with Jesse Jackson, and before you left LULAC, while you were president and you were telling me [off tape] about the Southland Corporation, I'm sorry.

**OBLEDO:** Well we drew up an agreement with the Southland Corporation to give more jobs to minorities, more contracts, and more equal opportunity. So Rainbow Coalition and LULAC joined forces at that time.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you get any opposition from some of your colleagues at LULAC for such a thing?

**OBLEDO:** No, I didn't.

**VASQUEZ:** Really?

**OBLEDO:** Yes. In fact, I used to advocate working closely with the Blacks to form a very powerful coalition between Blacks and the Hispanics. That would create a tremendous political bloc.

**VASQUEZ:** Was there always an agreement on the Black side, towards that kind of coalition?

**OBLEDO:** Well, [it] was generally accepted, I'd never had anyone openly oppose it.

**VASQUEZ:** When did you start getting involved with the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday?

**OBLEDO:** During the time that I was the National president of LULAC, I got appointed to the commission, the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission. We pushed some





legislation through that granted the Commission some monies for meetings etc. A federal grant, if you will. We lobbied the state legislatures for a Martin Luther

King Jr. holiday, federal holiday, we were mostly successful, so I left the

commission when I left the presidency of LULAC

**VASQUEZ:** What was the greatest opposition to the Martin Luther King holiday?

**[End Tape 2, Side A]**



legislation through the House of Representatives was made for the purpose of

to be granted if you will. It is believed the same legislation for a similar purpose

King is holding. Federal holding we were nearly successful to let the

commission when I left the presidency of J. P. Morgan

7. ASQUITH. When was the greatest opposition to the House of Commons?

(The Tape, Side A)

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

**OBLEDO:** I left the commission when I left the presidency of LULAC

**VASQUEZ:** What was the greatest opposition to the Martin Luther King holiday?

**OBLEDO:** Well you know there's still a lot of racial animosity in the United States, so we encountered that, now and then, actually it's racial discrimination against Blacks for no apparent reason, so that was a problem in trying to get a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

**VASQUEZ:** One of the states that resisted that was Arizona.

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** And, at one point, the LULAC cancelled its convention that they had scheduled for, I guess Tucson, is that right?

**OBLEDO:** I forgot, I think it was Phoenix.

**VASQUEZ:** Phoenix, I'm sorry.

**OBLEDO:** Yes. We did [it] as a protest to the states inaction in creating a holiday.

**VASQUEZ:** Whom did you work with on that commission. Coretta [Scott] King?

**OBLEDO:** Coretta King.

**VASQUEZ:** Could you mention some other folks...?

**OBLEDO:** Well there was some [U.S.] Senators, and Congressmen on the commission, some Governors on the commission, I forgot exactly who sat on the commission. They were a very prominent group of [people].

**VASQUEZ:** After you [left] LULAC, what kinds of things [did] you get involved with?  
[Were] you only involved in the Rainbow Coalition?





**OBLEDO:** Yes I [was] principally. I [was] still involved with MALDEF and the Southwest Voter Registration Project, all during those years, but basically my focus was on the Rainbow Coalition.

**VASQUEZ:** Were you practicing law at the time?

**OBLEDO:** Yes I was, here in Sacramento, in this office in fact.

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me about Jesse Jackson's run for President.

**OBLEDO:** Well it was exciting, I traveled with him, and I campaigned with him. I thought he was ready for the presidency, I thought he'd make a great president, because he's very idealistic and he's a hard worker. He likes to implement things. So this would have been a different country now, had he become President.

**VASQUEZ:** Was the country not ready for it?

**OBLEDO:** Well it depends; it was not because he lost. But I think that if he ran this year he might be able to make it, or in the future, we will have a Black President.

**VASQUEZ:** What does a Black candidate for president do to the political discourse of the country?

**OBLEDO:** Well it depends on his ideas. Jesse Jackson is very articulate, he's a visionary, and he's got a lot of charisma. He's done a lot of good for the country already by traveling abroad, as you know he brought the prisoners back from Bosnia, or from Kosovo, and before them he had freed a flyer from Iran, or someplace like that. So he's a good public relations person. Good for this country.

**VASQUEZ:** Why do you think Latinos didn't vote for him?

**OBLEDO:** Well there are still certain reservations about Blacks in the Latino community. We're guilty of prejudice in the same vein as the Anglo community is towards



ORLEDO: Yes I found myself... with MALIBU and the...  
Your... my... was on

the... Condition

WASQUEZ: Were you... in the...?

ORLEDO: Yes I was... in the... in 1962

WASQUEZ: Tell me about your... for the...

ORLEDO: Well it was... I... with him and I... with him I... in

was ready for the... I... a... in... for

very... and he's a... to... things by this

would have been a... now but he... President

WASQUEZ: Was the... not ready for it?

ORLEDO: Well it depends it was not... but I... that it is for the year he

might be able to... it is in the... we will have a... President

WASQUEZ: What does a... condition for... to the... of the

country?

ORLEDO: Well it depends on the... for... he's a... and

he's got a lot of... he's done a lot of... already by

traveling... as you know he brought the... back from... or from

Kansas and... he had... for... the...

So he's a good... for the country

WASQUEZ: Why do you think... to... for the...

ORLEDO: Well there are... about... in the... community

We're... in the... in the... community is...

Blacks, I believe. But I think that we've come a long ways in trying to work together, since we all have the same problems.

**VASQUEZ:** There's another organization, the California Coalition of Hispanic Organizations that you are instrumental in starting in 1974, is that correct?

**OBLEDO:** Right.

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me about that organization, up to the time that you were at the Rainbow Coalition.

**OBLEDO:** Well, I thought it was time that Hispanic organizations come together for a common purpose, in trying to promote equal opportunities for Hispanics in state government, both in the private and public sectors. So that's why we started the coalition. There were various, numerous Mexican-American organizations in California and I thought it would bring them together, to the table; we would have a common purpose and work together.

**VASQUEZ:** And, has that organization waned or grown....?

**OBLEDO:** It went out of existence for a while, but we re-established the organization about three years ago. And now I'm the President and Keda Alcalá is the Executive Director. So we're starting to move again, becoming involved in issues. For instance, we've become involved in the farm worker issue, where the federal government wanted to bring Guest Workers into the United States. We fought that legislation, and it was defeated. Now, we've become pro-active and are drafting a "farm worker bill of rights," to be submitted to the Congress. [It is] calling for rights in the fields of health, wages, housing etc., for farm workers.

**VASQUEZ:** How many organizations belong to this coalition?



Black, I believe that I think there is some a long way to go in work

together, since we all have the same problems

VASQUEZ: That's another organization, the California Coalition of Hispanic Organizations

that you are instrumental in setting up in 1974 in that context

ORLEDO: Right

VASQUEZ: Tell me about that organization up to the time that you were in the position

Orlando

ORLEDO: Well, I thought it was time that Hispanic organizations come together for a

common purpose in order to present a united front for the Hispanic in the

government, both in the private and public sectors. So that's why we started the

coalition. There were various national business associations in

California and I thought it would bring them together in the field we would have

a common purpose and work together

VASQUEZ: And, has the organization worked in some way

ORLEDO: It was one of our first projects but we established the organization from

three years ago. And now I'm the President and I'm also in the Executive

Director. So we're working in two areas, business and in public

business, we're working in the public sector, where the federal

government wanted to bring them together into the United States. We began the

legislation, and it was adopted. Now we're working for other and we're doing a

"Latin worker bill of rights" as it is referred to in the Congress. It's calling for

rights in the field of health, safety, housing, etc. for the workers

VASQUEZ: How many organizations belong to the coalition?

**OBLEDO:** About, 50 organizations.

**VASQUEZ:** Throughout California or...?

**OBLEDO:** Throughout California. Recently we've become the National Coalition of Hispanic Organizations, hopefully expanding our reach in the other states and try to recruit organizations from various states in the United States.

**VASQUEZ:** A high profile issue that took place in the last couple of years had to do with your opposition to the racist approach to immigration policies. There was a notorious billboard put up at the at the California border with Arizona. It said, "Welcome to California," what was it, "The Immigrant state?" Something like that?

**OBLEDO:** "The Land of the Illegal Immigrant."

**VASQUEZ:** The land of the illegal immigrant. And your response was, in your own public statement, that if that wasn't taken down you would personally go out and burn it down.

**OBLEDO:** That's correct.

**VASQUEZ:** What was your intent of making a statement like that?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I wanted to bring it to the public's attention – how racist some people were. If [I were] given the opportunity to argue for the immigrants, for their contributions to the state of California and to the United States, and I think those contributions outweigh any negative aspects of immigration.

**VASQUEZ:** Did you think that was the best way to go about it? By making an inflammatory statement like that?

**OBLEDO:** Well I thought that if they refused to take it down voluntarily, which I had hoped they would, that I would just burn it down.



Q: About 10 organizations.

A: Through California?

Q: Through California, through the National Federation of

Hispanic Organizations, through the state in the other states and the

to recruit organizations from various states in the United States.

A: A high profile state that was in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

Q: In the late 1980s or early 1990s, there was a national

billboard put up in the California border with Arizona. It said, "Welcome to

California," and it was a "The Land of the Illegal" slogan.

Q: "The Land of the Illegal" slogan.

A: The land of the illegal immigrants, and your response was to your own people.

Q: That's what I was talking about when I said you were not

down.

Q: That's correct.

A: What was your intent of setting a slogan like that?

Q: Well, I wanted to bring to the public's attention -- how many people were

it. It was to show the opportunity to argue for the immigrants, for that.

Q: In the case of California and other states, and I think some

contribution through the state's support of immigration.

A: Did you think that was the best way to show it? By making an advertisement

statement like that?

Q: Well, I thought that it was important to state it in a way that would

they would, that I would not have done.

**VASQUEZ:** And you were intent on carrying through with it?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, very much so.

**VASQUEZ:** What was the outcome of that?

**OBLEDO:** Well, the advertising company who had put up the billboard for rent, called the Fair Immigration Reform group and asked them to take the billboard down because it was creating a lot of havoc. So they took it down.

**VASQUEZ:** Did it ever go back up?

**OBLEDO:** No. It went up in Arizona for a day, they put it up someplace and it was taken down the following day, because the public objected to it. The governor of Arizona took my side on the issue.

**VASQUEZ:** What was his name?

**OBLEDO:** It's her name, but I forgot her name. [Governor Jane D. Hull]

**VASQUEZ:** What about politicians here in California? What was their posture?

**OBLEDO:** Well most of them didn't get involved in the issue, but I would think that they would side with me, knowing California politics.

**VASQUEZ:** Tell me more [about] other issues that you have been involved with in the Coalition, if you will, in the past 10 years?

**OBLEDO:** Well, in the last 3 years is the Coalition.

**VASQUEZ:** Is that how long it's been, in the last 3 years?

**OBLEDO:** Right. Well, we're becoming involved in the school issues here in Sacramento.

**VASQUEZ:** For example...

**OBLEDO:** Classroom curriculum, classroom size, bilingual education, etc., etc. We've also become involved in [an] issue in the [Salinas] Valley, 10 miles south of Salinas, a



VASQUEZ: And you were there on carrying enough with it  
ORLEDO: Yes, very much so  
VASQUEZ: What was the occasion of that?  
ORLEDO: Well, the advertising company, who had put up the billboard for me, called me  
Fair investigation for them, saying that I had been in the billboard days  
because it was creating a lot of trouble for them, and I was  
VASQUEZ: Did it ever go back up?  
ORLEDO: No, it went up in Arizona for a while, but it was not up long  
down the following day, because the public opinion was in the  
Arizona took my eye on the issue  
VASQUEZ: What was his name?  
ORLEDO: It's not known, but I forgot his name, I think  
VASQUEZ: I had about political party in California, I had some party  
ORLEDO: Well, some of them didn't get involved in the issue, but I would think they  
would side with me, knowing I was a politician  
VASQUEZ: Tell me more (about) when I know that you have been involved with the  
Coalition, if you will, in the past 10 years  
ORLEDO: Well, in the last 5 years I was involved  
VASQUEZ: Is that how long it's been in the last 5 years?  
ORLEDO: Right, Well, we're working together in the political party here in Arizona  
VASQUEZ: For example  
ORLEDO: (Clears on microphone, then says) I'm not a politician, etc. We're also  
because involved in (for) some in the (for) 10 years, I'm not a politician, etc.

town called Chualar, where there are about 800 Mexican-American families living. They didn't have safe drinking water, so I got on the federal government and the county government to improve the situation. Now I understand, I got a letter last week telling me that the county had tested the water and it was drinkable. So that was an accomplishment. We've also gotten involved in discrimination in the University [of California] system, against hiring of faculty etc. So we're on that project now.

**VASQUEZ:** Do people come to you with these issues, or do you go out and look for them?

**OBLEDO:** It works both ways. Some people call it to our attention, like the Chualar case, was called to our attention by an organization, other things we've just become proactive and initiated the issues ourselves.

**VASQUEZ:** The "Chualar Case" being the [drinking] water [issue]?

**OBLEDO:** Water.

**VASQUEZ:** I find something interesting. [When] we were talking [off tape] about your participation in issues of foreign policy in this country and traveling abroad, for example when you were president of LULAC, going to Cuba and demanding to free political prisoners, and I suppose, getting some kind of criticism. But I see that you have been opposed to U.S. foreign policies at different points. To give an example, [regarding] Cuba it seems that you were opposed to the restrictive policies and wanting to open some type of dialogue. At the same time you were critical of the Cuban government during the [President George] Bush and [President Ronald W.] Reagan years. You were opposed to policies towards Nicaragua. In the case of Mexico, you've traveled to Mexico and many times



town called Chertsey, where there were 100 Italian-American families  
living. They didn't have any drinking water so I got on the Italian government  
and the county government to improve the situation. Now I understand I got a  
letter last week telling me that the county had voted the water and it was  
drinking. So that was an accomplishment. We've also gotten involved in  
discussions in the University of California about the impact of energy  
and so we're on that project now.

VASQUEZ: Do people come to you with these things or do you go out and look for them?

ORLEDO: It works both ways. Some people call to see me, others the other way around.

was called to our attention by an expert who told us that he had

positive and indicated the same situation.

VASQUEZ: The "Chertsey Case" being the primary water source?

ORLEDO: Water.

VASQUEZ: I find something interesting (What) we were talking last time about you

participation in issues of foreign policy in this country and involving students for

example when you were president of the U.S.A. going to Cuba and discussing the

two political positions and I remember seeing some kind of exhibition. But I see

that you have been opposed to U.S. foreign policy in different places. In your

example (referring) to the situation that you were opposed to the Vietnam

policy and wanting to get out of Vietnam. At the same time you were

critical of the Cuban government during the Kennedy (Cuba) trip and

(President Kennedy) was a big man. You were opposed to policies which

Nicaragua in the case of Castro. The network of friends and family there

been opposed to different policies of immigration and even in the case of Argentina, you were on the side of Argentina in the Falkland Islands War. Let's take these one at a time and tell me what your thinking was behind that. First of all, you and foreign policy, as a Hispanic or Chicano leader. What do you have to say to that?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I think that as a community we do not have an impact on foreign policy at the present time. There are very few of us in foreign governmental affairs, very few of us in the State Department, very few of us ever speak out and let our feelings known about foreign policies. I [have] disagreed with our foreign policies on numerous occasions, for instance, during the Vietnam War. I disagree with ... the embargo towards Cuba now. I disagree with [our foreign policies] on the matter of some of the African countries and the policies we have now...

**VASQUEZ:** For example?

**OBLEDO:** Well, we didn't help some of the African nations when they were undergoing civil strife, and the [recent] massacres. And yet, we get involved in Kosovo.

**VASQUEZ:** You mean the case of Rwanda?

**OBLEDO:** Yes. Yet, we got involved in Kosovo. I don't understand it.

**VASQUEZ:** What comes to mind? What do you think is behind that?

**OBLEDO:** Well I have no idea, except that people are not knowledgeable, [those who] run the State [Department]. Just like I have never understood our policy toward Cuba. One time I was going to Cuba and I visited with the State Department. I asked them what they wanted from Castro, in order to have a [normalized] relationship.





“Well,” they said, “We want Castro to bring his soldiers back home, free political prisoners.

**VASQUEZ:** From Angola?

**OBLEDO:** Yes, from Angola, at that point. Free political prisoners and institute Democracy. And so I went to Castro and asked him to sever his ties with the Soviet Union and he said, “Well, I will do that tomorrow, provided that Americans bring their troops back home, provided it frees its political prisoners, provided that it severs its ties with the Soviet Union.” He said, “All I want is equal treatment, to be looked at with dignity and respect, that is all I am asking.” Well, obviously the U.S. was not about to bring its troops back home, or sever its ties with the Soviet Union. So we are asking the impossible.

**VASQUEZ:** And, in the case of Central America, specifically Nicaragua?

**OBLEDO:** Well, in Nicaragua, I always felt we were supporting the wrong cause. The Sandinistas had gained power [and] were trying to democratize Nicaragua, but we were supporting the “anti” [Contra] Forces. And so I never understood why we got involved with that.

**VASQUEZ:** In the case of Mexico and immigration policy, you talked a little while ago about an open border between Mexico and the United States. Explain to me, if you will, your understanding of what are the issues and what are the stakes [of a good] relationship between Mexico and the United States.

**OBLEDO:** I think that Mexico is very important in the United States in world affairs. They are our next-door neighbors, are a great [importer] of United States [goods], we have common communications etc., This matter of immigration is a serious



"Well," they said, "We want to bring his soldier's back home, for political

reasons."

YASQUEX: From Angeles?

ORLEDO: Yes, from Angeles in that point. I've noticed a number of incidents in

And so I went to Angeles and asked him to come in with the Justice Union and

he said, "Well, I will do that tomorrow, provided that I receive some thing."

People back home provided it for the political situation, provided that it was

in line with the Justice Union. He said, "All I want is equal treatment to be

looked at with equity and respect, that is all I am asking." Well, obviously the

U.S. was not doing things in equity but he said he would be in line with the Justice

Union so we are asking the impossible.

YASQUEX: And in the case of the Justice Union, especially in the case of

ORLEDO: Well, in the case of the Justice Union, I always tell you we are supporting the strong union. The

Justice Union and the Justice Union (but) were right to demand the Justice Union, but we

were supporting the "bad" Justice Union. And so I never understood why we

got involved with them.

YASQUEX: In the case of the Justice Union and the Justice Union, you talked a little while ago about

an open border between Mexico and the United States. I mean to me, if you will

your understanding of what the border and what it means for a good

relationship between Mexico and the United States.

ORLEDO: I think that Mexico is very important in the United States in world affairs. They

are our next-door neighbors and a great neighbor of United States people. We

have common concerns and the matter of immigration is a special

matter that has been going on for years. When I advocated an open border I suggested that the INS be converted to an information referral agency that the immigrants would stop there and they would be directed to places to live, where schools were available, [where] jobs were available, and after some time they would be returned to Mexico. But they would be living here without fear of apprehension, of deportation. We would benefit from their labor and so the Mexican would benefit because he would be working. Actually, the things that caused the immigration is the poor economic situation in Mexico. That is what drives the immigrant up here. I have a lot of respect for them because they are willing to die in order to come to the United States. Recently there have been over 1,500 deaths, down in the valleys of Arizona and California – people crossing the desert and mountains and they froze or they starved to death out in the desert. They have literally given up their lives to come here.

**VASQUEZ:** What would you say to those people? Would Mexico allow Americans to go into Mexico and have the same benefits as Mexican citizens, since Mexico has such stricter immigration policies itself?

**OBLEDO:** Well I don't know. I would have to talk to the Mexican government about that, but I do not think that they would fear Americans going into Mexico. I may be wrong at that, but Americans would not want to perform the work the Mexicans do in Mexico, for the wages that are being paid in Mexico.

**VASQUEZ:** Americans do go and retire ...

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, they have retirement villages

**VASQUEZ:** The Falklands War, what was your opposition to that?



matter that has been going on for years. When I returned in April 1968, I suggested that the FBI be contacted in an information request agency that the immigrants would not only have and they would be directed to them to live, where schools were available (where) jobs were available, and after some time they would be returned to Mexico. But they would be living here without any of the opportunities of American life. We would benefit from their labor and as the Mexican would benefit because he would be working. Actually, the thing that caused the immigration is the poor economic situation in Mexico. That is what drives the immigration. Now I have a lot of respect for the American people and willing to do in order to make it the United States. Actually, there have been over 1,500 deaths down here in the states of Arizona and California - people crossing the desert and mountains and they show in this desert at least in the desert.

They have already given up their lives to come here.

VASQUEZ: What would you say to these people? What would you recommend to the state?

Mexico and have the same benefits as Mexican citizens. Since Mexico has such a strong immigration policy really?

OSLEDO: Well I don't know I would have to call in the Mexican government about that.

but I do not think that they would have American rights like Mexico. I may be wrong in that, but Americans would not want to pay for the cost of the education in Mexico for the children that are being sent to Mexico.

VASQUEZ: Americans do pay for that ...

OSLEDO: Oh yes, they have different wages.

VASQUEZ: The Federal W. is what was recommended in the ...

**OBLEDO:** Well, England owns some islands off the coast of Argentina, which I thought rightfully belong to Argentina. Here England is half a world away from these islands. They have no business there. So I thought that rightfully they belonged to Argentina, and they should be given to Argentina.

**VASQUEZ:** Do you think American foreign policy is as important today as it was when you were in public office?

**OBLEDO:** Oh yes, it is even more important today.

**VASQUEZ:** Why?

**OBLEDO:** Because of the threat nuclear war annihilation, all it takes is one nuclear missile to destroy a city. And we could destroy all of human kind by nuclear war. So I think that is very important that good relations be established by nations in order to get along and in order to live together in this planet.

**VASQUEZ:** How has the world changed as a result of the decline of the Soviet Union as an opposition to the United States?

**OBLEDO:** I don't think it's changed very, very much. Obviously Russia is not a big superpower anymore. So I don't think we have to worry about them. But there are so many outbreaks of civil war around the world: In India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in Turkey, with the Kurds. African countries, [places] all over the globe you have these conflicts. In Ireland, in Israel, so I don't know what the solution is to those problems.

**VASQUEZ:** Now that the United States is, I guess, the only real world super power, what responsibility does that bring the United States?



OSLEDO: Well, Pakistan owns some islands off the coast of Argentina, which I thought

rightly belong to Argentina. Now Pakistan is still a world away from them

islands. They have no business there. So I thought that rightly they belonged to

Argentina, and they should be given to Argentina.

VASQUEZ: Do you think American foreign policy is as important today as it was when you

were in public office?

OSLEDO: Or yet it is even more important today.

VASQUEZ: Why?

OSLEDO: Because of the great number of people who are still in the military mind in

Latin America. And it would be very difficult to change that by means of a few

that is very important that good relations be established by means of order to get

along and in order to live together in the future.

VASQUEZ: How has the world changed as a result of the changes of the Soviet Union as an

opposition to the United States?

OSLEDO: I don't think it's changed very much. However, Russia is not a big

superpower anymore. So I don't think we have to worry about them. But there are

so many opponents of ours, we should be careful. I don't believe that

Afghanistan is Turkey, with the Soviet Union, because it's not all over the

place you have these conflicts in Israel, in Korea, and in Vietnam when the

solution is to these problems.

VASQUEZ: Now that the United States is a great power and would report power, what

responsibility does it have to the United States?

**OBLEDO:** We have the responsibility to bring peace and harmony to the world. To establish a better quality of life [so] that nobody starves to death; that nobody dies of illnesses that could be treated; that we establish a better quality of life for all peoples on earth.

**VASQUEZ:** Let me shift to something a little more intimate, a little more personal. You have a philosophy of life, which you set to pen and paper. I'll read it to you, if you don't mind. [Tell me] if anything has changed as a result of a half-century of public service. You say: "Wake up each day determined to be happy. Do not let anyone or anything deviate you from this goal. Keep in mind that life is uncertain; each day should be lived as if it was your last. Remember that you are on this earth only once and at most for a few thousands weeks. So make this day as pleasant as possible. Treat persons with respect and courtesy, if you are not able to do so, then avoid them. Establish your priorities and follow them. Take good care of your physical, mental, and spiritual health. Satisfy your needs and desires, never to excess. Always keep them within the bounds of established moral and ethical standards. Seek financial security early in life, so that in later years you can enjoy leisure time and be in a position to help others with funding contributions. Keep company with those you enjoy and from whom happiness abounds. Strongly believe in yourself and everything about you, realizing that there is and only will be one of you in, the history of this universe. Always have faith in others and the Higher Power. Be honest to and with yourself, striving for the best. If you feel the need, never fail to apologize, and to live by the Ten Commandments and live life by the Golden Rule.



OBLEDO: We have the responsibility to bring peace and harmony to the world. To establish

a better quality of life for all people is our duty to do so. It is not only the duty of

leaders but also of every citizen to work for the betterment of the world for all

people on earth.

VASQUEZ: Let me start by mentioning a little more personal. You have a

philosophy of life, which you set as your goal. It is to you, it is your duty

and I will say it is something that has changed in a small but significant way

because you say "Wake up and get out of bed" and "Get up and get out of bed" and

to nothing else. You know that goal. Keep it in mind and it is a wonderful world

that should be lived in. It is a great joy. It is a great joy that you are in the world

only once and a great joy to live in. It is a great joy to live in. It is a great joy

possible. That person with respect and courage. It is a great joy to do so.

then avoid them. It is a great joy to do so. It is a great joy to do so.

your physical, mental, and spiritual health. It is a great joy to do so.

to success. Always keep them within the limits of your ability and your

standards. It is a great joy to do so. It is a great joy to do so.

learn to live and be in a position to help others with their problems. It is

company with them. It is a great joy to do so. It is a great joy to do so.

believe in yourself and everything that you believe in. It is a great joy to do so.

be one of you in the history of the world. It is a great joy to do so.

higher power. It is a great joy to do so. It is a great joy to do so.

need, never fail to recognize and to live in the world. It is a great joy to do so.

by the Golden Rule

**OBLEDO:** Well, I still believe by that philosophy, I try to anyway. I think it leads to a better life and a happy life. And you can enjoy yourself while you're living.

**VASQUEZ:** Would you still offer this advice to young people in today's world?

**OBLEDO:** I certainly would, every one of those points.

**VASQUEZ:** This is an opportunity for you to sort of summarize your career, for this interview anyway. What have you learned about people, about politics, about being an American citizen, in you're nearly half-century of public life?

**OBLEDO:** Well, America is the best place in the world. Everybody in the world would like to come to live here, because we have freedoms, we have job opportunities, even though we have some problems they are minor compared to problems of other nations. So this is the greatest place on earth – bar none. And so far as my relationship with people in politics, I find that most people are basically good. They are easy to get along with, they are willing to help. It's amazing. For instance, I found recently I have been very pleased because I have been confined to a wheel chair and I'm amazed with a number of the people who are willing to help with the wheel chair, putting it in the car, or getting it out, or getting it fixed. I'm simply amazed by the generosity expressed.

In politics, I think politics needs reformation, particularly because winning an elective office depends so much on how much money you have. If you don't have the money chances are you won't make it. If you have a lot of money it doesn't necessarily mean a victory but it means that you will make a good race, one way or another. So that the money thing ought to be changed. The contributions to



OSLEDO: Well, I am a little bit of a cynic. I think it leads to a sense

of a happy life. And you can enjoy yourself while you're living

VASQUEZ: Would you still offer this advice to young people in today's world?

OSLEDO: I certainly would. Every one of them before.

VASQUEZ: This is an opportunity for you to sort of summarize your career, for the last few

anyway. What have you learned about people, about politics, about living in

American cities, in your own life, in your own experience?

OSLEDO: Well, America is the best place in the world. Everybody in the world would like

to come to live here. Because we have freedom, we have the opportunities, even

though we have a lot of problems, but the most important is freedom of other

nations. So this is the greatest thing we have - but more. And so far as my

relationship with people in politics, I feel that most people are basically good.

They are easy to get along with, they are willing to take it's something. For

instance, I found recently I have been very pleased because I have been contacted

to a school that I'm named with a number of the people who are willing to

help with the school. And when it is the case in politics, it's not getting a school

I'm simply named by the government, I'm not.

In politics, I think politics needs to be more, particularly because winning an

elective office depends on how much money you have. It's not that I have

the money, because the way we make it is not like a lot of money, it's about

necessarily mean a victory, but it means that you will make a good name, one way

or another. So that the money thing ought to be changed. The money thing to

**OBLEDO:** political campaigns ought to be changed. Limitations ought to be placed [on how much money can be spent.]

**VASQUEZ:** Some people have argued that politics in America has gotten very negative, very vicious and personal, and many times the issues are not allowed to be the focus of the debate, but people's personal habits or private lives have become the issue. Do you agree with that, and what do you think the solution is?

**OBLEDO:** That's true in many campaigns where you get the negative ads, the negative responses, but it all depends on the candidate. If a candidate is a good person, has faith in the future, has faith in this country, he can run a campaign without bashing the opponent in negative terms.

**VASQUEZ:** So money, negativity, would have to be reformed?

**OBLEDO:** Reformed.

**VASQUEZ:** What do you say to young people that turn away from public service or civic service because they say it is just not worth the cost to their own private life, or to their own health even.

**OBLEDO:** I think that everyone ought to do public service at some point or another. I think that it is a great contribution. I think you get a lot of self-satisfaction from it, from your contribution to the betterment of life. So I think it is all worth it, no matter how great the sacrifice.

**VASQUEZ:** Is there anything that I might not have discussed, or might have asked that I didn't, or is there a statement that you would like to put into the record? To summarize your life, and [your] public life?



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much money can be spent.

VASQUEZ: Some people have argued that politics in America has gotten very negative, very

vision and personal, and many argue the system has not allowed to be the focus of

the debate, but people's personal beliefs or private lives become the focus. Do

you agree with that, and what do you think the solution is?

ORLEDO: That's true in many campaigns where people are the focus and the negative

response, but it all depends on the candidate. If a candidate is a good person, has

faith in the future, has faith in the country, he can run a campaign without

making the opponent in negative terms.

VASQUEZ: So money, negatively, would have to be reduced?

ORLEDO: Reduced.

VASQUEZ: When do you say to young people that when they have problems or are

in trouble, they say it is just not worth the cost to their own private life, or to

their own health even.

ORLEDO: I think that everyone ought to be able to answer a question or another. I think

that it is a great contribution. I think you get a lot of self-satisfaction from it. From

your contribution to the betterment of life. So that's what I think is worth it, no matter

how great the sacrifice.

VASQUEZ: Is there anything that I might not have discussed or might have asked that I

think of as a question that you would like to put into the record? To

summarize your life and your public life?

**OBLEDO:** Well I've been blessed to a great extent. I grew up in a very poor home, where I saw a lot of discrimination and police brutality. But I had faith. I had faith in the system. I went to a school where my basic language, which was Spanish, was condemned. We were not allowed to speak the language; we were punished for [speaking] it. I saw a lot of discrimination in housing, in job opportunities. And I thought I would devote my life to try to better those conditions as much as possible. And that is why I joined MALDEF. When I was working with MALDEF, I thought, "What a great opportunity. Here I am being paid for the work that I love to do," and I was getting a salary for it. So we encountered a lot of cases and I think we did a lot of good. Obviously there is still a lot to be done, but we made an effort to correct a lot of situations.

When we founded the Southwest Voter Registration Project, I thought that was the most important project in our community. I think that time has proven me right, because we have changed the political face in California and Texas.

Hispanics are more involved, they are running more and more for public office, they're winning more often. So we are getting there.

And actually politics is the ultimate solution, is the answer, to all of our problems. In politics, for instance, if you have a particular problem in a school district and you have a school board that's Hispanic or people who are allied with Hispanics, then they can change the situation simply by a motion and a call for a vote— and then a vote. And that's it. You do not have to litigate and spend thousands of dollars in a court case. The same way with city government. If you have a city council that is Hispanic or is comprised of people who are sympathetic to



QUREDO:

Well, I've been blessed in a great way. I grew up in a very poor home, where I

saw a lot of hardships and police brutality. But I had faith in the

system. I went to a school where my father taught, which was Spanish, and

continued. We were not allowed to speak the language, we were punished for

(speaking) it. I saw a lot of discrimination in the way we were treated, and I

thought I would never see the day when I would be treated as much as

possible. And that is why I fought back. I was not willing to

stand back. I thought, "What a great opportunity. I am being paid for the

work that I love to do," and I was getting a salary. But for the moment and a lot

of years and I think we did a lot of good. I think that is a lot to be proud

but we made an effort to make a lot of difference.

When we founded the Spanish American League, I thought that was

the most important effort in the movement. I think that that was the

right because we have changed the political face in California and I want

Hispanics are more involved. They are working more and more for public office.

They are working more often so we are getting more

And actually politics is the biggest change. It is the most important part of

in politics, for instance, if you have a political problem in a school district and

you have a school board that is Hispanic. It people who are all of with Hispanics

that they are able to do the job. They are able to do the job. They are able to do the job.

then a vote. And that's it. You do not have to fight and spend thousands of

dollars in a court case. The same way with the government. If you have a city

council that is Hispanic or I am proud of people who are Spanish.

Hispanic causes, then you can change a life of a city merely by votes. In the same way, Congress, and the President. The President can change things by a stroke of a pen. If he is sympathetic to our cause, he can change a lot of situations very readily and without a lot of effort. I encourage people to get involved in politics, to run for public office if possible. To do good if they win, to continue to try if they loose. Never to give up. I believe that a person ought to believe strongly in themselves and what they can do.

One of the things I counsel young people about is that early in life you ought to try to get financially secure. By that I mean, by getting involved in real estate, or insurance, studying the Wall Street Journal, learning about the stock market, the Dow Jones Averages, the NASDAQ. Learn all of those things and save some money for the future, for your retirement, for contributions [to causes] you believe in. But money is power. If you are financially secure, if you have money, you can pick up the phone and call any politician in America and they would get on the phone. If you are penniless, they won't pay attention to you. And that is just a fact of life. If you are rich, people will pay attention to you. If you are poor, no one will listen.

In addition to that, I think people neglect it, but health is a very important element in life. If you are healthy, anything is possible. If you are not, nothing is possible. So, take care of your health, get checkups, watch your diet, exercise. Someone said that the key to life was good health, having something to do, and someone to love. If you have those three things, you have a good life and I truly believe that. I have been very blessed. I have a wonderful wife, Keda Alcalá Obledo, who I have





been married to for about two years now. She has made me very happy, and made my life complete.

**VASQUEZ:** Some of the demographic projections that are being made now, indicate that in a very short time, less than 20 years, when numerically at least Hispanics will be a force to be contended. We see already, the beginnings of a catering to the Hispanic market, and the money that we spend in this country. If you were to be looking into the future, what do you see in the next 35 to 40 years for Hispanics in the United States?

**OBLEDO:** When we founded the Southwest Voter Registration Project, I made a statement that there could be 100 million Hispanics in the United States, but if we were not registered to vote, and didn't vote, it would mean nothing at all. So now we are getting empowered by encouraging people to register to vote. I made a statement that here in the state of California, every major government institution will be controlled by a Hispanic in the next 20 years and I'm talking about governor on down the line attorney general, all the public offices, all the institutions, all the school boards in the state.

The same way in Texas, it's going to happen eventually, where [we] will control every political office in the state. And I would think that in Florida the same thing would happen as with the Hispanics in other states. With all that power, with the Hispanics living in the seven major states of this country, we control the Electoral College that elects the president. But obviously, when that happens, when we gain the electoral leverage in Texas, in California, Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania, they will change the system that elects the president. Probably to a



been wanted for about two years now. He has made me very happy, and made

my life complete.

7. QUESTION: Some of the demographic problems that are being made now indicate that in a

very short time, less than 25 years, when approximately 100 million Hispanics will be a

force to be counted. It's not clear if the beginning of a century in the

Hispanic market and the market that we speak in this country. If you were to be

looking into the future, when do you see in the year 25 to 40 years for Hispanics in

the United States?

ANSWER: When we looked at the numbers, I think I made a statement

that there could be 100 million Hispanics in the United States. But if we were not

registered to vote, and that's what I would mean, not at all. So now we are

getting supported by some very good people to register to vote. I think a statement

that there is the need of California, every major government institution will be

controlled by a Hispanic in the next 25 years and I'm talking about government

down the line, state government, all the public offices, all the institutions of the

school boards in the state.

The same way is I feel it's going to happen everywhere where I go with control

every political office in the state. And I would think that in 25 years the same thing

would happen as with the Hispanics in education. With all that power, with the

Hispanics living in the state capital, state of the state, we control the state and

California that elects the president, the governor, when the power, when we gain

the electoral college in Texas, in California, Florida, New York, and

Presidents, they will change the system, but that is the president, probably in a

majority vote, instead of the Electoral College, because we will be able to control the Electoral College votes and elect a president.

**VASQUEZ:** Do you think that we will make the same mistakes when we have that kind of leverage, or power, that others have made? How can we avoid that?

**OBLEDO:** Well, I would hope not. I would hope that we would be a more enlightened people, be more fair and equitable in our decisions and look out for all the people. Forget about the past, forget about the injuries, forget about the discrimination, just look forward to a better life for all people and try to make that possible through government decisions.

**VASQUEZ:** Mr. Obledo, thank you very much for this interview.

**OBLEDO:** Thank you very much.

**[End Tape 2]**



majority vote, instead of the Electoral College, because we will be able to control

the Electoral College vote and elect a president.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that we will make the same mistake when we have the kind of

strategy to power, the others are making here, can we avoid that?

ORLEDO: Well, I would hope not. I would hope that we would be a little enlightened

people, be more fair and equitable in our decisions and look out for all the people.

Forget about the past, forget about the future, focus about the present and

just look forward to a better life for all people and try to make that possible.

through government decisions.

VASQUEZ: Mr. Orledo, thank you very much for the discussion.

ORLEDO: Thank you very much.

(End Tape 2)







